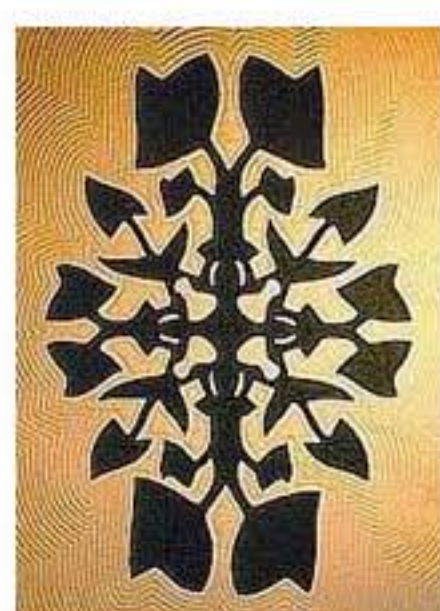


As early as 1820 native Hawaiian women learned to make quilts from missionaries. Unlike the quilts we know as "Hawaiian Quilts" today, these early quilts were pieced.

Traditional Bed Covers: Kapa Moe

Although quilts made of scraps of fabric must have seemed strange to the native women there were familiar aspects as well. Their traditional bedcoverings were made of kapa, a cloth made from the inner bark of native trees. Strips of this inner bark were beaten and felted together to make it into a cloth that was smooth and soft to the skin. Kapa moe was kapa made into a bedcovering.



Like a quilt, kapa moe was made in layers. The layers were only connected at one end so a person could adjust the number of layers slept under depending on the need for warmth. Sometimes the kapa was scented with fragrances made from native flowers. The top sheet of kapa was dyed and stamped with an overall design. Women of higher status had the leisure time to decorate more extensively

Kapa Moe Decoration is Influenced by Imported Fabric Design

It has often been suggested that the traditional Hawaiian applique quilts were based on kapa moe but the kapa designs were geometric and quite unlike the flowing designs we are familiar with in Hawaiian quilts. So it appears that the reverse is true. After the arrival of the first explorers to the islands natives began to use fabric as an inspiration in decorating their kapa including the use of the fleur-de-lis design.

The Unique Hawaiian Quilt is Born

By 1870 the traditional Hawaiian Quilt emerged. Loretta G. H. Woodard, project director of the Hawaiian Quilt Research Project, reports that "Isabella Bird, who visited Hawaii in 1870, seems to be describing a Hawaiian quilt (floral center with surrounding arabesque design) in her book, *Six Months in the Sandwich Islands*, published in 1872.

Cotton fabric had become more available with the westernization of Hawaii. This made it possible to create quilts with applique on solid cloth. These appliquéd quilts had a single design radiating symmetrically from the center covering the whole quilt. The pattern was made much like we might make a cut paper snowflake but with cloth. These quilts were usually made with two solid colors, one for the background and one for the appliquéd design.

Applique: A Way to Represent Hawaii's Natural Beauty

Inspiration for many of the designs on these quilts came from the natural beauty of the Hawaiian Islands. The use of curved lines and plant like motifs resulted in an intricate, organic composition that was often based on local vegetables or flowers including interesting leaf patterns.

Woodard suggests the following as the basis for the development of traditional Hawaiian Quilts. "It seems to me much more likely that Hawaiian quilters developed their unique floral appliqué in response to the American rediscovery of appliqué in the 1840-1860 period. By 1840, they were skilled seamstresses and quiltmakers, well ready to create their own unique interpretations of new designs. I suspect that floral appliqué set up a particular resonance for them providing another creative outlet for expressing the symbolism of the natural world--flowers, plants, vistas, wind, rain, etc. that found expression in their poetry, song, and dance and that was such an integral part of everyday life."

Hawaiian Quilt Design: Based on Personal Inspiration

The designing of a quilt was a very personal thing. Women often created a certain design based on something she had observed or a significant event. Dreams were considered an inspired source for quilt design. Linda Moriarity, a Hawaii native, wrote, "My own grandmother related such an experience, when a dream gave her the vision for a quilt. The following morning she got up and immediately sketched the design, developing the pattern by the end of the day." ¹

Each quilt was given a name, often reflecting the inspiration behind the design. Because of the tradition of individually designed quilts innumerable unique Hawaiian Quilts have been made over the years. Fortunately many of these intriguing quilts have survived as they were only used for special occasions and then passed on from generation to generation.

Each Hawaiian Quilt a Time Consuming Masterpiece

Thousands of fine, hidden stitches were required in order to applique the design onto the cloth. Yet this extensive applique was only part of the detailed work that went into making these marvelous quilts. Next the layers had to be quilted together. Sometimes straight or diagonal lines were used but more often echo quilting was done. This technique repeated the shape of the original design in a closely radiating pattern.

In 1933 a speaker drew attention to a quilt maker in an exhibition of Hawaiian quilting. She pointed out, "Mrs. Montgomery can sew very fast and still make her stitches small and even; she follows the pattern freehand. I want you to notice how cleverly she conceals the knot in the stuffing of the quilt." ² As you can imagine, these quilts were extremely time consuming and demand a great deal of skill and patience.

The Flag Quilt: Another Hawaiian Quilt Making Tradition

Hawaiian natives have developed another unique quilt form, one that uses the flag of Hawaii and other symbols of Hawaiian royalty in its design. These quilts honor the short-lived Hawaiian Kingdom. Local Americans overthrew the monarchy in 1893 though it was not formally annexed by the United States until 1898. These quilts are often referred to as "My Beloved Flag" and even today are highly valued by the island families that own them.



by Nancy Lee Chong

Embroidered and Crazy Quilts Were Made as Well

During the late 1800s and early 1900s Hawaiian women made crazy quilts and outline embroidery quilts just as women on the mainland did. While following popular quilting styles of the time we find that some aspects of these quilts reflect the culture of Hawaii. Motifs embroidered on crazy quilts included crowns like those used on flag quilts, fish and birds. Outline embroidered quilts were predominantly floral compared to greater variety of motifs on the mainland. The popular Hawaiian symbol, Coat of Arms, was centered on several of these embroidered quilts.

The Story of the Queen Liliuokalani's Quilt

Queen Liliuokalani made a fascinating crazy quilt during her in house imprisonment in her palace. She had done all she could to prevent the annexation of Hawaii by the United States after the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy. In the end she was unjustly convicted of being a part of a royalist plot. See "The Queen's Quilt", linked below, for the picture and story.

But don't think of quilting in Hawaii as something from the distant past. Rather it has continued to be done through the years and the art of making a traditional Hawaiian Quilt is still popular today.

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¹ p181 ["To Honor and Comfort: Native Quilting Traditions"](#), by Marsha MacDowall (Editor), C. Kurt Dewhurst (Editor)

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Webpages:

["The Queen's Quilt" about the quilt made by Queen Lili'uokalani including her story and quilt.](#)