

Buckboard Antique Quilts

Judy Howard, Owner Since 1976

Author of five award-winning books

405-751-3885 BuckboardQuilts@cox.net

www.BuckboardQuilts.com & www.HeavenlyPatchwork.com

Shop online with 400 pictures. Free Shipping—Return Privilege

Quilting History and Collecting Tips ©

Patchwork quilting in the Colonial Days is a romanticized myth. The extent of patchwork quilting was mending the bedding they brought to America with patches of worn-out clothing. Professional weavers and spinners and textile makers were banned from coming to Colonial America because Britain didn't want competition in the new colony. So most overworked women carded and spun wool into warm clothing and bedding, but never quilted for pleasure. Colonial women sometimes used a coarse twill or plain-woven fabric woven with a linen warp and a woollen weft called a **Lindsey-Woolsey Quilt**. Only a few housewives wealthy enough for help did decorative needlework and quilting learned from their mother countries. They had to import printed fabric from Calcutta India, England or France.

Broderie Perse became popular in the early to mid-1800s. Since imported prints were hard to get, women cut flowers from fabric and applied onto larger solid fabrics. **Whole Cloth Quilts** were also made by layering solid top, back and filling and quilting together with elaborate designs. Piecing together squares and triangles of cut up fabric was only done in bordering a medallion quilt with a central motif.

Pieced quilts didn't appear before 1840 when the textile industry was developed in America making fabric readily available. Then women turned from spinning to quilting. They shared quilt blocks with neighbors and at quilting bees. In the mid-1800s, Godey's Lady's Book started publishing quilt patterns. By the late 1800's familiar patterns appeared in farm magazines and later in newspapers. In the 1890's, Sears and Wards catalogs offered free patterns with fabric sales.

There is no proof of existence of the romanticized abolitionist **Underground Railroad quilts** like the Log Cabin with the black center indicating a safe house or Jacobs Ladders giving a map for a safe path for slaves escape. However, **Abolitionist Quilts** were made for fairs in the North in the 1830s to raise money and awareness for anti-slavery. **Gunboat Quilts** were made and sold in the South at craft bazaars and fairs starting in 1861 to raise money to pay for needed gun boats and later medical supplies, blankets and clothing for the soldiers. The U.S. Sanitary Commission collected and distributed 250,000 donated quilts 48"x74" to be given to the Union soldiers. Since textiles were cut off to the South and material cost \$25/yard in 1864 in the South, the women wove homespun fabric for warm clothing for soldiers.

After the Civil War, from 1876 to 1914, **Victorian Crazy quilts** made of fine weighted silk and velvet were popularized. Women embroidered fancy embellishments on clothing and every conceivable textile to decorate their homes as well as covers for square grand pianos, beds and table tops. Sometimes they cut up their fancy ballroom gowns and their husband's velvet jackets for the quilts. The further down the social ladder

and the later into the 1900s, the courser the fabrics that were used including corduroys, wools and rayons.

A fascinating tradition was for the groom and bride's families to each make a heavily adorned **wedding crazy quilt** for warmth for the honeymoon buggy ride. Competition became intense as to whose family did the best needlework with the most embellishment including painted or embroidered flowers, fans, initials, dates, animals, birds, spider webs and Kate Greenaway figures.

Another fascinating traditon was for each young girl to make a **baker's dozen quilts** for her dowry chest—twelve utilitarian everyday quilts necessary to keep the family warm until she had daughters old enough to help make additional quilts. The thirteenth quilt was the bridal quilt, usually of museum quality appliqued with flowers and ribbons with a swag border or undulating vine and rosebud border and quilted with hearts and feather wreathes. The friends and family would then hold quilting bees to quilt these thirteen tops. Some were superstitious that only the bride should quilt the bridal quilt. But in other areas of the country, the custom was that after the last stitch was taken in the bride's quilt, they threw a cat in the middle of the quilt. The girl nearest where the cat jumped out would be the next to marry.

Redwork using turkey red thread and iron on transfers was introduced in the 1870s. By the turn of the century, women were buying preprinted squares selling for a penny, known as **penny squares** and redwork quilts became popular. From 1910 to 1930 embroidered quilts using blue thread became popular also.

Return to traditional pieced quilting became popular also in the late 1800's with the proliferation of toy and shirting prints in the navy, madder red, rust and brown primarily with a few calicoes featuring anchors, horses, flowers, etc.

From the 1840s-1880s, the **red and green appliqued roses** or tulips and feathers were popular, especially in the South. Quilts tended to be queen size to cover their large Southern plantation beds.

Following WWI, quilt colors continued to be drab in the maroon, greys and browns cut from the widows' mourning clothes. By 1925, the home decorating and ladies' magazines began pushing optimism and lighter and brighter décor and quilts with an abrupt change from the somber colors to refreshing pastels and bright floral calicos with dreamy floral appliques prized.

When the **Great Depression** hit in 1929, women obviously had no money for fabric and recycled every scrap of old clothing and cut up feed, sugar and flour sacks for the backing and colorful floral piecing for their quilts. On the farms, they grew patches of cotton specifically to card for the batting.

Quilts in the western frontier and during the Great Depression were a necessity for survival for warmth, window coverings and room partitions in the drafty sod dugouts and log cabins in the desolate wind-barren wilderness. Pioneers brought as many of their family quilts as they could pile into their covered wagons for comfort and their only connection with loved ones. Family quilts also provided the only touch of beauty in their desolate lonely homes. The act of piecing and quilting became women's healing therapy

as children or husbands died. It was their only expression for artistic creativity and fellowship with neighbors through the church quilting bees.

Time for quilting became rarer during the **WWII** as many women were forced to go to work in the ammunition factories and then worked to support their families when millions of their husbands died in the war. Many red, white and blue star quilts were made as fund-raisers by different groups as everyone wanted to support the troops and help by buying war bonds. After WWII, quilting fell out of vogue until resurgence for more patriotic quilts in 1976 with the celebration of America's **Centennial**.

In 1971, when the **Whitney Museum of American Art** in New York City displayed quilts on their walls, quilts were elevated from craft to art. As of November, 2011, it is estimated that there are **27 million expert quilters** generating a **\$3.58 billion quilting business**—no longer a cottage industry, but the chief source of revenue for a huge number of professionals worldwide.

As reported in the 2003 survey, the average dedicated quilter is defined as: 99% female, 58 years old, well educated (76% attended college), affluent (average annual household income of \$88,397), spends an average of \$1,934 per year on quilting, and has been quilting on average for 12 years.

Eighty-one percent of dedicated quilters have a separate room for sewing and quilting only. These rooms contain an average of \$5,542 worth of quilting tools and supplies, \$2,860 worth of fabric and two sewing machines. In the last year the dedicated quilter purchased an average of 100 yards of fabric at an average price of \$7.67 per yard. Their favorite patterns were small-scale floral prints (78%), tone-on-tone neutrals (68%), and holiday prints (68%). Most purchased colors were jewel tones (34%), bright colors (25%), and pastels (24%).

Dedicated quilters love to read. They purchased an average of 5.5 books last year at an average cost of \$21.80 each and subscribed to or read 4.2 magazines per month. And they are computer literate. Eighty-four percent of dedicated quilters own a computer and spend an average of 2.2 hours per week on quilting websites.

#####

The most highly prized antique quilts are the rarest earliest quilts: lindsley-woolsey, broderie perse, red and green appliques of the mid 1800s, and Amish quilts because of their distinctive graphic art appeal and dynamic solid colors. And obviously all historic, pictorial, patriotic, early signed and dated quilts are highly desirable. Red and white or blue and white quilts are much sought after. Log Cabin Barn Raising, Bethlehem Star, Wedding Ring, Grandmother's Flower Gardens, Crazy Quilts and any graphic design that is bordered like a work of art appeals to current collectors for decorating. Even signed and dated jacquard woven coverlets with pictorial borders are collectible. The quilt industry offers reproduction fabrics from the Depression era, centennial and Civil War eras so modern-day quilters can replicate the nostalgia and charm of grandma's bed covers.

The earth tones of the late 1800's and rich jewel tones of the crazy quilts are popular in today's decorating schemes. The Depression era quilts with a hodgepodge of pastels and brights mix well with any and every color scheme. The red and white quilts

are fun to use as accents for Christmas, Valentine's Day and 4th of July celebrations whether used on the bed, table or wall.

The **quilt provenance** or story adds greatly to the value of each quilt. Every quilt tells a story and that story ties each generation together as a remembrance of a mother's legacy of love. I have a quilt made as a wedding quilt in 1853 from the 1834 calico of a dress of her grandmother with a note saying the backing was homespun by grandmother Smith and the listing of the eight generations the quilt passed through. Because of the provenance, that quilt appraised for \$17,500, which illustrates the importance of signing and dating quilts and recording and attaching the provenance to each quilt.

Because of the current trend of tracing our genealogy and connecting with our roots, collecting friendship or fund-raiser quilts has received recent attention. Discovering the mystery behind a signature quilt is quite rewarding. I spent a year researching a red, white and blue quilt with a center block embroidered with two tables, gavel, candle, book and quill, three empty flag poles, "FB" and "BB" and names like Ida Marie and Ruby with three digit numbers. Research revealed that a few of the names were national officers of the Grand Army of the Republic, Women's Relief Corp and that it was probably made as a fund-raiser to aid wounded Civil War soldiers and their families.

When **collecting antique quilts**, one of the most important considerations is condition, especially if they will be used on beds and washed frequently. Crazy quilts that contain fragile silks might not be a wise investment, unless they're framed or on the wall out of harm's way. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. When you're buying quilts, choose what sings to you personally and you fall in love with. Other questions to consider when collecting: do the colors compliment your décor? is it framed like a work of graphic art? does it bring a smile to your lips? invoke a nostalgic charm? comfort,? cheer? practical? affordable? serve your need? a size that's adaptable to your bed? Invest in the best quilts you can afford and resist the temptation to buy every bargain you find if it shows wear and doesn't appeal to you.

Whether stacked in a corner cupboard, folded at the foot of the bed, used as a tablecloth, tree skirt, bed covers turned length for width with pillows covering the top third of the bed, displayed on the wall, folded over the upstairs banister, a door, or the couch or chair, antique quilts add charm, warmth, comfort and nostalgia to any home and transport us back to our past.