Crazy Quilt, 1905

By Maggie Bear • Plano, Iowa • Collection of Marie Toomes

The meaning of some quilts can be read in the way they look. However, most quilts can only be understood if the story is known. A "Crazy Quilt" was made in Plano, Iowa, in 1905. It is a diary of neighborhood activities during the years 1903 to 1905.
In 1884, John Turner decided to leave Weldon, Illinois, for a new home in Kansas. The prospect of such a move undoubtedly was met with mixed emotions by his wife, Sarah, since she would be leaving friends and family. To provide a tangible remembrance of their friendship, Sarah’s friends presented her with a stack of calico quilt blocks, each with the signature of the maker. This cherished gift was carefully packed for transport to Mayfield, Kansas. Once Sarah, John, and their two children reached their new Kansas home, Sarah set the blocks together and completed the quilting. Finished in 1885, her new quilt not only provided warmth and beauty but treasured memories of special friends, many of whom she would never see again.1

The practice of making quilts for significant events was not unique to Sarah Turner and her circle of friends. Of the 13,107 quilts recorded during the Kansas Quilt Project, over one-fourth were made as markers of events or experiences. Quilts made between 1925 and 1988 account for ninety percent of the data on these quilts, with forty-one percent made after 1976.

These special quilts are important records of personal and community events and as such are valuable resources as cultural documents. As historian Rachel Maines observes, textiles “inform us about the substance of ordinary life. . . .”2 Quilts made specifically as personal statements about experiences hold special meaning to the maker and recipient, and can provide insight into the way women respond to their world. The motivation for making quilts as markers may stem from the desire to create a permanent record. Much like a diary, a quilt can freeze an event in time and can evoke memories for its maker or recipient."
Although some quilt historians argue that women used quilts "to help create for themselves a new, more public role," others argue that quilting did not create this new role as much as it reflected women's increased involvement in current affairs. Some women used their sewing skills like others used a pen. Unlike books, quilts are made primarily to be shared with a limited audience; usually a small circle of friends and family. It has only been in recent years that quilts have hung as banners to proclaim a public cause.

Commemorating special passages, particularly in the lives of family members, can be viewed as an outgrowth of the traditional women's role of family nurturer. In many cultures women have been responsible for the overall maintenance of the home. A value structure elevating, while at the same time confining, women to this role developed among the middle class in Europe and America in the early 1800s. Women had primary responsibility for preservation of the family unit and protection of the moral and cultural well-being of the community. Caring for her children, creating an attractive and comfortable home, being the prime mover in establishing schools, churches, and libraries were parts of her socially acceptable role. This model of behavior was promoted in the church, in social attitudes, and literature of the day.

In addition to literature expounding upon the proper roles for women in society, the print media influenced the use of quilts to mark special events. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the community sharing of patchwork patterns was supplemented by published information from pattern mail-order companies and "household hint" columns in newspapers and magazines. Thus, an individual pattern and its possible symbolism influenced a far wider audience. In 1912, Mrs. H.N.S. of Missouri told fellow readers in Good Housekeeping:

I saved a piece of each wash suit my little son had until he was ten years old, and then made him a wonderful quilt of the scraps. Each one told a story. For instance, the blue line scrap was from the suit he wore the first day at school; the white one was from the suit he had on when his picture was taken; and so on. He never tires of the quilt, especially if he is ill. We can entertain him by the hour, telling him of the different scraps. I mean to keep it until he is a man and then give it to his little boy.6

The number of symbolic quilts has increased during the twentieth century. This rise may be related to contemporary women's role in the workforce. With increasingly limited time to devote to handwork, many women have chosen to use their time for quilts that are special in some way. On another level, quilts may be viewed by the contemporary quilt maker as a means to preserve old values of home and family in an era when women divide their time among at-home and outside roles.

Although quilts serve as symbolic records, they seldom directly reveal the maker's intention. Very few quilts are inscribed with the reason for their making. Those that are inscribed are generally quilts made after 1975, paralleling the emergence of a self-conscious interest in making commemorative quilts.

The patterns themselves rarely provide concrete evidence of the event for which the quilt was constructed. For example, even when the provenance is unknown, "Wedding Ring" quilts are often assumed to have been made for that occasion. This assumption stems from the promotion of this pattern for that use. In the late 1920s, Ruby Short McKim operated a pattern studio in Independence, Missouri, and her catalog, 101 Quilt Patterns, advocated the "Wedding Ring" pattern as an ideal wedding quilt.8 Of the "Wedding Ring" quilts seen in Kansas, only one-third were said to have been made for a special occasion and less than half of those were made for a wedding. Others were made for graduations, birthdays, and to honor the birth of a child.

The events women select to commemorate with their quilts can be divided into three general categories: those that celebrate rites of passage; those that mark private or personal memories; and those that commemorate community events. The first two categories reflect the primary motivation for creating marker quilts, both in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Over half of the marker quilts recorded gave notice to a rite of passage, a ritual that marks the point in someone's life where he or she undergoes a change in status. The ritual can be as elaborate as a church confirmation or as simple as a baby shower. What is important is that those who participate in the ritual recognize that at its end the guest of honor will assume a new social role and enter another phase of life. A rite of passage, therefore, marks a change in status and causes the members of a community to recognize this change and the individual's new role. The giving of a quilt can function as part of the rite of passage ceremony.
The number of quilts made to mark a rite of passage appears to have increased in the second quarter of the twentieth century. Whereas family histories note weddings and births as being almost exclusively the events that inspired special quilts in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, interviews with more recent makers and recipients added many other passages.

This change is partly a result of an increase in the number and range of ceremonies celebrated by society. High school graduations and fiftieth wedding anniversaries have grown more common because of a better-educated and longer-lived population. With social changes have come altered forms of celebration. The nineteenth-century adolescent might mark her coming of age with a quilt made for a hope chest; today's woman, with more options, might also celebrate a university degree and a choice of career with a quilt. The passages recorded most often in quilts are those that are recognized most commonly by American society in general: birth, birthdays, graduation, weddings, anniversaries, and death.

With the birth of a child a new life begins and a woman assumes a new role as a mother. Friends and relatives often acknowledge this change of status by the presentation of a quilt. The new baby is often the recipient of the gift, but some quilts mark the new mother's change in status. Nancy Lovette Miller homesteaded in Kiowa County, Kansas, in the 1880s. A widow with four children, she remarried and gave birth to four more. She drew on these experiences when making a special quilt for her seven-year-old granddaughter, Fern Fromme, in 1923. Fern recalled Grandmother Miller's explanation of the quilt as she worked on it, "Every women needs an ugly old quilt when she has her babies." Fern did not use the quilt during childbirth but as a pallet on the floor for her babies.

In Kansas there is not a significant number of nineteenth-century birth-relatedquilts. Some historians propose that the high infant mortality rate of the nineteenth century discouraged parents from investing emotion and affection in newborns and toddlers, but the unprecedented nineteenth-century interest in children and childrearing practices, despite an infant mortality rate that did not decrease significantly until 1920, works to dispel this notion. It can be speculated, however, that the lack of mid-nineteenth-century quilts is more closely related to the attitude of some childbearing women. Women were likely to bear large families; many died in childbirth or at an early age from compounded effects of numerous pregnancies. For many nineteenth-century women, birth was viewed with anxiety and apprehension. Perhaps this accounts for the limited number of quilts made during this period as symbolic markers of birth.

The developing emphasis in the nineteenth century on childhood as a separate and important phase in life influenced society's attitude toward children. Beginning in the 1800s, middle class America adopted Jean Jacques Rousseau's argument that children were beings in their own right, not miniature adults. Advice and childrearing books spread the increasingly emphatic message that it was primarily the mother's responsibility to care for and provide instruction to the child.

The burgeoning quilt pattern industry responded to these changes by producing juvenile theme patterns specifically for children. "Dorcas Magazine of Woman's Handwork," which published one of the first juvenile patterns in 1886, advocated embroidered pictorial designs, such as toys, nursery rhymes, or pets. Today, juvenile patterns continue to be offered, encouraging the creation of special baby quilts.

The practice of making birthday quilts is also far more popular in the twentieth than in the nineteenth century. While birthday quilts have been made for both children and adults alike, one possible explanation for the lack of earlier quilts is that the celebration of children's birthdays only became popular in the nineteenth century. Like many trends, this one increased and spread over time.

It does not appear that quilts are made for one birthday over another. The lone exception are quilts made for a man's twenty-first birthday. These quilts have been called freedom or coming-of-age quilts. Thomas Herbert Jeter was only eight years old when his parents moved from Bedford County, Virginia, to Alden, Kansas, in 1888. He had a great fondness for his eastern relatives and corresponded with them all of his life. In honor of his twenty-first birthday he received a sampler quilt from these relatives. This practice was more common in the nineteenth century, but the tradition is still recognized by some. When Lawrence quilt maker Jean Mitchell's son Cotter was eight years old, he offered to make a quilt design for her. It was a geometric pattern rendered in orange, yellow-green, rust, and brown crayon. In 1977,
for Cotter's twenty-first birthday, Jean made him a quilt inspired by that drawing.

In Kansas, education has been at the forefront of community services. Before 1900 it was standard for pupils to attend school through the eighth grade. In the early twentieth century, a high school education was promoted by social reformers, and high schools were built and accredited across the state. By the 1920s, a majority of Kansas children continued on to high school. The use of quilts specifically to celebrate graduation parallels this development. The subsequent emphasis on acquiring a college education has given rise to quilts made for graduation from college as well.

Marriage is considered an important life experience, and the wedding ceremony, as the rite of passage, traditionally has been a time for gift giving. There is substantial evidence that quilts have been viewed as an appropriate gift in both the nineteenth and twentieth century. At one time it was the custom for the bride to make her own wedding quilt. Ruby Stein of Sedgwick, Kansas, recalled that her grandmother, Elizabeth White Horst, needed seven quilts for her dowry. An Old Order Mennonite from western Maryland, Elizabeth Horst came to Kansas in the 1880s settling near Hesston. The tradition of seven quilts as a dowry was continued in Kansas by several of her daughters. This is, however, a rare story.

In oral histories and in fiction one finds mention of marriage quilts. In 1849, T. A. Arthur wrote nostalgically in "The Quilting Party," of "our younger days" when a half-dozen patchwork quilts were a woman's dowry. Harriett Beecher Stowe, also writing of an earlier era, ca. 1800, explained the role of the quilting bee as preparation for marriage. About the same time, George Washington Harris wrote of Mrs. Yardley who made twenty quilts for the dowry of her unattractive daughter Sal; obviously this was an excessive amount and possibly intended as incentive for potential suitors.

Nearly all fictional accounts are nostalgic and may romanticize the use of quilts to mark marriages and engagements. However, the consistency of the stories indicates that quilts and quilting bees were an important part of a wedding preparation. The volume of quilts documented as wedding quilts also lends credence to this belief.

Unlike wedding quilts, anniversary commemoratives appear to be almost exclusively a twentieth-century tradition. The frequent appearance of anniversary quilts in this century may be attributed to people living longer to celebrate the advanced anniversaries for which most of these quilts are made. The majority of anniversary quilts appear to commemorate fortieth, fiftieth, and sixtieth anniversaries. Recent anniversary quilts are often of original design with embroidered family histories marking events in the lives of the couple and their extended family. A sampler of symbolic and pictorial blocks is frequently the format for these quilts. Stylistically similar to quilts made for the nation's bicentennial, anniversary quilts made after 1976 have adopted this design format and the heavy use of symbolism.

Needlework has long been an accepted medium for mourning. Literature makes references to late eighteenth and nineteenth-century quilts that carried mourning symbolism, such as "The Death of General Washington," and the "Kentucky Coffin Quilt." This style of quilt is rare in Kansas, as are "Memory Quilts," made from the clothing of the deceased. Elaborate mourning rituals, which fostered the production of these quilts, passed quickly out of fashion by the end of the Victorian era. By the early 1900s the nineteenth-century implications of the word "memory" in a quilt pattern were considered unpleasant, and quilts made of clothing from the deceased were not popular because of the depressing effect upon the remaining members of the household. Some twentieth-century quilter makers have continued to use quilts as a devise for mourning, however. In the 1940s, Grace Acres of WaKeeney made a "Grandmother's Flower Garden" quilt from the dresses of her deceased daughter, and Rosemary Holthaus of Seneca made a quilt after the sudden death of her husband in 1978.

Quilts that celebrate rites of passage are only one type of marker quilt. Other quilts are used as "memory prompts," bringing back memories of a particular time, place, or event. Some of these quilts become important symbols because of the conditions under which they were made and used. In this way quilts serve as very personal diaries.

In Mirra Bank's Anonymous Was a Woman, Marguerite Ickis quoted her grandmother as saying, "My whole life is in that quilt. It scares me sometimes when I look at it...my hopes and fears, my joys and sorrows, my love and hates. I tremble sometimes when I remember what that quilt knows about me." This feeling of having stitched your life into a quilt is shared by many quilters and is one
taken literally by some. The last fifteen years has seen a rise in the number of pictorial quilts which tell a story quite literally through appliquéd or pieced pictures. Most memory quilts are not so literal. Usually the meaning behind the quilt is revealed through oral history. Yet the textile stands as a permanent marker to the maker or owner.

One of the most frequently marked experiences in a woman’s life is her relationship with her family. While some quilts are made for husbands, parents, or other relatives, children and grandchildren are honored most often with a gift of a quilt. Sometimes quilts are given at a special time, but the important consideration for many quilt makers is that each child or grandchild own one of her quilts. For the maker, quilts illuminate the importance of their relationship and ensure a degree of immortality. For the receiver, they provide a tangible memory of the maker.

Friendship quilts are a popular way to commemorate a special relationship and oftentimes mark specific events. The friendship or album quilt tradition began around 1840 in the mid-Atlantic states and soon spread. Following the custom of preparing and presenting bound autograph albums, people signed blocks to be included in quilts to be given to a friend, an esteemed person, or to be kept by the quilt’s organizer as a tangible record of her friends. Many mid-nineteenth-century quilts were given to people emigrating west, and it was in fact during these peak years of national mobility that friendship quilts became a fad.

Although some friendship quilts contain only names, others are graced with inscriptions expressing sentiments of love, friendship, and religious salvation. An 1844 album quilt was inscribed heavily with heartrending verses for Ann Root whose departure for the West was linked with her wedding vows, a frequent experience during the nineteenth century: “Hope this square of ‘odds and ends,’ A simple gift dear Ann, ‘tis true. Let it remind you of your friends, Who part from - yet can ne’re forget you. Mary Stevens.”

Some women use their sewing talents to commemorate events outside their home. Historically, community events marked with a quilt were an extension of women’s private-sphere role as preserver of cultural traditions and as moral reformer. For example, a signature quilt made in 1910 preserved the names of community members and businesses in Atlanta, Kansas, while at the same time raised funds for a church building project. Politically inspired quilts tended to relate to moral causes like temperance or to patriotic themes such as victory during wartime. In the past fifteen years, a trend has developed for community anniversary quilts.

Quilts made to commemorate community events constituted the smallest group of special occasion quilts recorded by the quilt project. Community-event quilts provide a unique insight, however, into women’s involvement in the community and, on another level, their role in society. Efforts that focused on the community were most frequently manifested in fundraising, anniversary, patriotic, and political quilts. It is interesting to note that while fundraising, and more recently, community anniversary quilts were made primarily to be shared with the community, most patriotic and political quilts tended to be made as personal expressions for a limited audience. These symbolic textiles functioned as a creative means for articulating and recording the maker’s interests and concerns.

The fundraising quilt is the most common type of community-oriented quilt. Charitable works are an area in which women have been encouraged to participate, and quilt makers have applied their skills to raise money for causes, most in support of church affiliated projects. Ladies aid societies developed in many Kansas churches as a means to organize women’s efforts while providing a social network of friends. Their labor had many benefits. The money raised for the church helped support missionary work, fostered community work, assisted with financing new church buildings, and even paid the minister’s salary. An article in the Holton, Kansas, Recorder in 1927, recounted the fundraising activity of a small Methodist church in June 1884.

Olive Hill [church] will have an ice cream supper June 16. They will sell the wheel quilt at that time, the proceeds will be used to finish the church. If memory serves us right, ... names were solicited with 10 cents for placing the names on the tire, 25 cents on a spoke, and 50 cents on the hub.... Mr. Stauffer was the auctioneer who disposed of the wheel quilt which sold for twenty-five dollars to John Dix.

Community anniversary quilts are created to display local, regional or national spirit and patriotism, and like personal anniversary quilts, are more frequently made to mark significant lengths of time, such as centennial celebrations. This type of quilt has gained remarkable popularity in
Kansas, particularly in the last thirty years as the state and its towns have reached centennial years. In the nineteenth century, the nation’s centennial was the main catalyst for such quilts which often used printed fabrics with patriotic motifs. These commemorative prints included dates (1776-1876), names or pictures of national heroes, as well as the symbolic flag and eagle. The use of commemorative fabric in quilts was much more prevalent in the last century than it is today.

Many quilt historians link the present revival in quilting to the celebration of the nation’s bicentennial. In the mid-1970s, Americans renewed their enthusiasm for traditional crafts. The current revival in quilting fostered an explosion of new designs, among them the symbol-laden and pictorial community anniversary quilt. Stylistically, patterns for these and other patriotic quilts are generally the most literal interpretations of the event they were made to commemorate of all community quilts.

During times of war, patriotic quilts have increased markedly. According to historian Herbert R. Collins, “The earliest textiles commemorating events in the United States centered around the battles and leaders of the American Revolution.”26 While Collins primarily addressed the manufacture of printed textiles in the form of handkerchiefs, bandannas, banners and ribbons, he noted these same themes were present in quilts.

Few wars spurred women into stitching quilts as much as did World War I. Quilt making was just beginning its first revival of the twentieth century, and support for the war effort was motivation for many to retrieve fabric from the scrap bags and begin quilting. In the United States relief committees sent overseas many patchwork quilts for refugees left homeless and destitute. When the United States entered the war in 1917, women were urged to make “Liberty Quilts” for home use, allowing blankets to go to “Our Boys Over There.”27

Some women served their country by joining the Red Cross. In Kansas alone there were 110 chapters with more than ten thousand women engaged in its work.28 In December 1917, Modern Priscilla responded to the need for Red Cross fundraising by featuring an article, “One Thousand Dollars for the Red Cross Can Be Raised On A Memorial Quilt.”29 The quilt was designed using red and white fabric to form the cross and, like other signature fundraising quilts, a fee was charged to have a name embroidered on the top. Many groups adopted this pattern for their fundraising efforts.

While World War II did not inspire quilt makers to the degree witnessed in the previous war, some community groups raised funds for the war effort through their quilts. The Buffville Community Grange Ladies met at the local school to piece their “Victory Quilt.” The names stitched in the center of the quilt, forming a “V,” were those of young men in service from the community. Ernest Redington’s name was embroidered in gold thread. He was killed in action in 1944 at Okinawa. Community members paid twenty-five cents to have their names embroidered on the quilt and raffle tickets were sold for fifty cents; the proceeds were used to send packages to service men.

Some women have recorded their political leanings in quilts. It was the exceptional quilt maker who used her skills to symbolically express her opinion or show support for a politician, political party, or cause. In 1936, Kansas governor Alf Landon, was the Republican presidential candidate. During the campaign Robert E. Reed was chairman of the Sullivan County Young Republicans in Sullivan, Indiana. To lend her support to the cause, Robert’s mother, Carrie, made a “Sunflower” quilt, symbolic of the candidate’s home state.

For women to justify entry into such “male concerns” as politics often involved adding a domestic dimension.30 It was preservation of home and family that eventually brought legions of women into the political arena to support social reform in education, housing, care for the mentally ill, and sale of alcohol. By 1890 the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union was the largest women’s organization in America; its goal of a national prohibition act became a reality in 1919 with the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment. It soon became apparent, however, that the amendment was unenforceable.

The debate over repeal of the amendment was at its peak in 1932 when Pearl Thompson Davidson voiced her commitment and support for prohibition through a “White Ribbon” quilt. Pearl, an active lecturer for the WCTU since 1925, worked diligently against repeal. Her lecture circuit included churches and schools from Mankato to Liberal, Kansas. At each stop, she asked ladies to make and sign a block for this symbolic friendship quilt. The pattern was the white ribbon, the emblem for the WCTU, and the quilt was constructed in the organization’s colors, blue and white. Despite the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment in December 1933, Pearl continued to work for the
WCTU for another seven years. According to family history, the affection for this quilt, which stood as a symbol of her work, was confirmed when her house burned and this was one of the few items she saved from the flames.

By studying quilts made as markers of rites of passage, personal memories and community events, the interests and concerns of many women's lives can be pieced together. Though some quilts are more literal in their symbolism than others, they all express the maker's roles, in both the private and public sphere. Although designers have at times suggested a special use for a pattern, the form a quilt takes is a personal expression. And, even though certain occasions are more celebrated with quilts than others, what is to be marked with a quilt is ultimately a personal decision. New motives for making marker quilts are ever increasing. The common thread among these special quilts is that they all have meaning that goes far beyond necessity.

NOTES

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1. Interview with Lillie Weib, Wichita, February 1989.
7. Statistics show 57.6 percent of all women are in the workforce. See U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, figures for June 1989. Another possibility for the increase in symbolic quilts is the continuing influence of the print media. Current quilt magazines are filled with special patterns and touching stories to encourage readers to produce similar quilts.
9. The Kansas Quilt Project found that rites of passage quilts constituted 52 percent of the quilts made as a "marker."
10. Interview with Fern Fromme, Bucklin, Kansas, March 1989.
14. Before 1900, only four percent of Kansas students went on to high school.
21. Over 40 percent of the "marker" quilts documented by the Kansas Quilt Project were made for a family member.
30. Riley, The Female Frontier, 177.

TEXTILE DIARIES
birth

**RITES OF PASSAGE**

Quilts made to celebrate rites of passage make up over half of the "marker" quilts studied. A rite of passage is a ritual that marks a new stage in a person's life. Such rituals include church confirmations, weddings, and baby showers.

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Patch Checkerboard, 1923  
*By Nancy Lovette Miller • Kinsley, Kansas • Collection of Fern Fromme*

Nancy Lovette Miller homesteaded in Kiowa County in the 1880s. She had eight children. In 1923 she made a special quilt for her granddaughter Fern Fromme. According to Grandmother Miller, "Every woman needs an ugly old quilt when she has her babies." Fern, however, never used the quilt as bedding for a home delivery.
Mexican Rose, 1844
By Susannah Boyer • Sandusky, Ohio • Collection of Bari Garst

In the 1800s quilts made for babies were often full-size. While Susannah Boyer of Sandusky, Ohio, was expecting her sixth child she appliqued a baby quilt. The quilt was brought to Kansas sixty years later by her son.

Roly Poly Animals, 1922
By Violet Taylor Hornet • Geary County, Kansas Collection of Betty Mae Hornet Rooster

In 1922, Violet Taylor Hornet of Geary County used the “Roly Poly Animals” pattern designed by Ruby McKim of Independence, Missouri. The quilt was made for the birth of Violet’s daughter. It was the only special quilt she ever made.
Mothers and Babies, 1978
By Chris Wolf Edmonds • Lawrence, Kansas • Collection of Teresa Wolf Baumgartner

Chris Wolf Edmonds of Lawrence designs quilt patterns. She began making quilts as gifts for relatives. In 1978 she created "Mothers and Babies" for her niece. The pattern is offered on the commercial market.

Whole Cloth, 1939
By Maria Penner Funk
Hillsboro, Kansas • Collection of Mary Beth Coeving

Mennonites sometimes use whole widths of cloth to make quilts. Maria Penner Funk of Hillsboro made a whole cloth quilt for her granddaughter in 1939. In the communities of Hillsboro and Hesston there is a tradition to add crocheted borders to quilt edges. Special quilts are used to take newborns to church.
birthdays

Sunbonnet Sue, 1936
By Rosa Panning • Ellinwood, Kansas • Collection of Eloise Winkelmann

"I don't remember learning to quilt," recalls Eloise Winkelmann of Ellinwood, "we were just expected to sit down and help [quilt] for a while before we went off to play." Her grandmother, Rosa Panning, made her a "Sunbonnet Sue" quilt for her tenth birthday. Eloise has continued this tradition. She recently completed a "Sunbonnet Babies" quilt for her granddaughter's sixth birthday.

Cotter's Field, 1977
By Jean Mitchell • Lawrence, Kansas • Collection of Cotter Mitchell

The practice of freedom quilts continues in the twentieth century. Jean Mitchell of Lawrence made such a quilt for her son Cotter's twenty-first birthday. Cotter grew up watching his mother make quilts. When he was eight years old, he designed a quilt using a geometric pattern. This pattern was used to create his freedom quilt.
Fan, 1912

By Friends of Mary Jane Vore Moss • Angus, Nebraska • Collection of Lucille Wright

In 1912, Mary Jane Vore Moss operated the switchboard for the local telephone line in Angus, Nebraska. Twenty of the women on her line surprised her with a fiftieth birthday quilt.
graduation

Queen Anne’s Favorite, 1917

By Abigail McKinney and Leta Pedersen • Nichols County, Nebraska • Collection of Alberta Bagley

Leta Pedersen graduated from high school in Nichols County, Nebraska, in 1917. She helped her mother, Abigail McKinney, complete the quilt “Queen Anne’s Favorite” for her graduation. The quilt has 5,700 pieces.

Friendship Sampler, 1981

By Family and Friends of Patricia Michaels • Lawrence and Russell, Kansas • Collection of Patricia Michaels

Patricia Michaels earned her doctoral degree in history from the University of Kansas in 1981. Her dissertation was about the history of commercial airlines’ passenger service. Upon graduation, family and friends presented her with a quilt. The quilt’s theme focuses on her dissertation subject.
In 1937, Lora Housholder Wold selected the pattern ‘The Spirit of St. Louis’ to make a quilt for her son’s high school graduation. The pattern was created to honor Lindbergh’s flight across the Atlantic in 1927. The pattern represents an airplane propeller. During World War II the pattern reminded the maker of the Nazi swastika. The quilt was put away and never used.
weddings

Sampler, ca. 1845
By Friends of Sarah Greenfield
Washington County, Pennsylvania
Collection of Lucymae Meiners

Sarah Greenfield and Nathan Ullery were married on April 10, 1845, in Washington County, Pennsylvania. Family history tells us that the couple received a sampler quilt. Names of friends and family are found on the quilt. For some unknown reason other names have been removed.

Whitework, 1853
By Olive Orr Varner and Jacinthia Orr Truscott • Illinois • Collection of Donald Bostwick

In 1853, Olive Orr Varner was sixteen years old and living in Wayne County, Illinois. According to family stories Olive and her sister Jacinthia made a whitework quilt for Olive’s hope chest. Olive married eight years later. She brought the quilt with her to Butler County in 1878.
Pioneer Block, 1935

By Friends of Martha Sears Sievers Hansen • Alva, Oklahoma • Collection of Martha Sears Sievers Hansen

Martha Sears Sievers Hansen of Arkansas City began making quilts as a teenager. While living in Alva, Oklahoma, she became engaged. Her engagement party was a quilting bee. Each of the fifty guests was asked to work on a block. Martha set the blocks together and a local quilter finished the wedding quilt.
Double Wedding Ring, 1934

By Marthine Davignon Considine • Stockton, Kansas • Collection of Darlene Bugner

Marthine Davignon Considine made a “Double Wedding Ring” quilt for her marriage. Even though it was made during the Great Depression, Marthine purchased new fabric for the quilt. The pastel cotton fabrics cost twenty-five cents a yard. Although this pattern was promoted as a wedding quilt, many quilt makers have used it to mark other events.
By Kathleen Brassfield and Friends
Prairie Village, Kansas • Collection of Shauna and Robert Gregory

Quilts are still associated with weddings. However, it is no longer the custom for brides to make their own wedding quilts. Today a quilt is usually given as a gift. Shauna and Robert Gregory were married in 1987. Shauna's mother, Kathleen Brassfield, created a "Bridal Wreath" quilt for her only daughter.

anniversaries

Tulips, 1910
Maker of Top Unknown
Quilted by Jane Welsh and Ann Welsh Exort
Pennsylvania
Collection of Mrs. Vernon Slocombe

The earliest anniversary quilt found in Kansas was made in 1910. A "Tulip" quilt top was made for the fiftieth anniversary of Mr. and Mrs. John S. Welsh. The top was made in Pennsylvania.
mournings

**Grandmother's Flower Garden, ca. 1938-1949**
*By Grace Marjorie Robards Acre, Wewoka, Kansas*  
*Collection of Cynthia Acre Ziegler*

Grace Marjorie Robards Acre made a quilt from the dresses of her daughter who died when she was only eight years old.

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**Broken Dishes, 1978-1983**
*By Rosemary Olberding Holthaus, Seneca, Kansas*  
*Collection of Rosemary Holthaus*

Other quilts are made to help the maker work through mourning. Rosemary Olberding Holthaus of Seneca made a special quilt after the death of her husband. She remembers, "When it was snowing and blowing, and I was feeling sorry for myself, I searched my quilt patterns and scrap box of materials and started working on it."
Quilts that celebrate rites of passage are only one type of "marker" quilt. Other quilts bring back memories of a particular time, place, or event. Still other quilts become important symbols because of the conditions under which they were made and used. All serve as a record much like a diary.

Sampler, 1980

By Oleta Howard • Kansas City, Kansas
Collection of Oleta Howard

Many women feel that they have stitched their lives into a quilt. In the last few years this has literally been done through pictorial quilts. These quilts tell the story of a woman's life through pictures.
Postage Stamp, 1953-1954

By Mary Alice Richardson and Florence Richardson Reiter • Stafford, Kansas
Collection of Maurice Reiter

Mary Alice Richardson and Florence Richardson Reiter are mother and daughter. The two completed a "Postage Stamp" quilt in 1954. Florence remembers, "During the last lingering illness of my father, the sewing machine was moved to the basement room so the noise would not bother him and the cutting and sewing of more tiny squares became a method of escape and relaxation for me and my mother, as we took turns sitting and caring for him."

Floral Applique, 1939

By Pauline Rome • Garden City, Kansas
Collection of Pat Ohnes

Some quilts are made to celebrate an important time in the quilt maker's life. Pauline Rome of Garden City, the mother of twelve children, was very happy when rural electricity reached her farm in 1939. She celebrated by recording the event in her quilt. Rural Electrification Administration poles are embroidered between the flower petals. The top was machine quilted in the 1940s when Pauline got her first electric sewing machine.
Beggar's Block, ca. 1860-1879
By Sarah Shook Blouch Albright • Lebanon County, Pennsylvania • Collection of Eleanor Gooden

Quilts sometimes take on a special meaning because of personal feelings. Elizabeth Blouch Weltmer moved to Kansas in 1879 from Pennsylvania. A quilt, made for her by her mother, became a symbol of her earlier life. The "Beggar's Block" quilt was never used. It was always called the "Pennsylvania quilt."
family

Princess Feather, 1851-1852
By Margaret Wilson • Corning, Iowa
Collection of Muriel Harris

Margaret Wilson stitched the relationship between herself and her children into a “Princess Feather” quilt. In one corner is the outline of her hand and the image of her infant son’s hand and foot. The outline of her daughter’s hands can be seen in another corner.

Album Block, 1928-1929
By Ada Hurt • Linn County, Kansas • Collection of Bev Garrett

Ada Hurt of Linn County gave birth to her son in 1924. Her mother-in-law, Maud Hurt, gave the child many new clothes. Ada spent two years making an “Album Block” quilt, using these clothes as her son outgrew them. The blocks are embroidered with names of family members and information about each piece of clothing. The quilt marks the bonds between three generations.
Rosegay, 1985
By Martha Hershey - Harmony, Kansas - Collection of Martha Hershey

For many quilt makers it is important to make quilts for each child or grandchild. Martha Hershey of Harper has made a quilt for each of her five children. She is now working on quilts for her nine grandchildren. Each grandchild will receive a quilt when he or she becomes an adult. "Rosegay" was made for her first grandchild.
friendships

Prairie Lily, 1985
By Friends of Lillie Webb in the Prairie Quilt Guild
Wichita, Kansas • Collection of Lillie Webb

Lillie Webb of Wichita has made over seventy quilts since her retirement. Her friends made her a friendship quilt top in honor of her seventy-sixth birthday. The top was presented at the reception for her one-woman quilt exhibit in 1985. The pattern is a symbolic reference to her name and her life on the Kansas prairie.

“For Lillie Hutcherson Webb, who was born in 1909 and who loved color and quilts before she can remember ... is given this ... by Prairie Quilt Guild members who admire her as a quilter, cherish her as a person and value the way she blooms, a true prairie Lily, in their midst.”

Roman Cross Signature Quilt, 1884-1885
By Sarah Turner and Friends • Weldon, Illinois, and
Mayfield, Kansas • Collection of Dorothy Newton

In 1884, John and Sarah Turner left Weldon, Illinois, to make a new home in Kansas. Sarah’s friends gave her a stack of signature quilt blocks. When Sarah reached her new home in Mayfield she set the blocks together, finishing in 1885.
Scraper Star, 1985

By Women’s Missionary Service Commission of Emma Mennonite Church - Topeka, Indiana - Collection of Roger and Cynthia Neufeld Smith.

Many ladies aid groups have given a quilt to a departing minister. The Women’s Missionary Service Commission of the Emma Mennonite Church in Topeka, Indiana, made a “Scraper Star” quilt for Roger Neufeld Smith when he accepted a new church in Topeka, Kansas.
COMMUNITY EVENTS

Quilts created to celebrate community events express women's involvement and concerns in the community. Some quilts, like those made for fundraising and community anniversaries, were made to be shared with the community. Most political and patriotic quilts were made for a smaller audience of family and friends.

fundraiser

Signature Fundraiser, 1902
By the Ladies Aid Society of the Congregational Church - Downs, Kansas - Collection of Catherine Cotton Barber (Recently donated to the Kansas State Historical Society)

Fundraising is the most common type of community event marked by quilts. Quilts were often made by church groups to raise money for charity. The Ladies Aid Society of the Congregational Church in Downs made a signature fundraising quilt in 1902.
Flying Geese, 1985

By Mary McCaffrey • Topeka, Kansas • Collection of Mildred McCaffrey

Mary McCaffrey made a “Flying Geese” quilt top for the annual auction at the Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Baileyville. The ladies of the church did the quilting.
Mariner’s Compass, 1987
By Marjie Loftus • Paityn, Kansas • Collection of Julie Kiffin

The number of fundraising quilts has increased in recent years. The Kansas City Quilt Guild was the first in the state to annually auction miniature quilts. Funds raised go to the Mayor’s Christmas Tree Fund providing gifts to the needy.

Cedar Crest, 1988
By Arlene Anderson • Olathe, Kansas • Private Collection

The Kansas Quilt Project held three fundraising auctions. Miniature quilts were donated by project supporters. Arlene Anderson, former Kansas First Lady, donated the quilt “Cedar Crest.”
Flying Geese, 1876
By Amelia Tucker • Eureka, Kansas • Collection of Adalia Wood-Rockhill

In the nineteenth century some women made quilts to celebrate the nation’s centennial. Fabric printed with patriotic images was often used. In 1876, Amelia Tucker of Eureka made a “Flying Geese” quilt. According to the family story, Amelia’s husband went to the centennial celebration in Philadelphia. He brought Amelia the centennial fabric used in the quilt.

community anniversaries

Kansas and Chase County Centennial Quilt, 1961
By the Ladies Aid Society of the Methodist Church Bazaar, Kansas • Collection of Irene Schuilling

In 1961, Kansas celebrated the centennial of its statehood. The Ladies Aid Society of the Methodist Church in Bazaar made a quilt that honored both the state centennial and the Chase County centennial. The quilt was used to raise money for the town’s centennial celebration.
Oh, Beautiful, 1985
By Suzanne Warren Brown • Arkansas City, Kansas • Collection of Suzanne Warren Brown

In 1986, Suzanne Warren Brown of Arkansas City entered her quilt “Oh, Beautiful” in a national contest to honor the centennial of the Statue of Liberty. Suzanne’s quilt was chosen as the Kansas entry.
patriotism

Eagle Quilt, 1914-1917
By Elizabeth Marthaler Stauf • Marysville, Kansas
Collection of Ruth Hall

During times of world tensions there is often an increase in patriotic quilts. Around 1914, Elizabeth Marthaler Stauf began an "Eagle Quilt."

Flags and Shields, 1921
By Theresa Wilhemina Ladwig • Westmoreland, Kansas
Collection of Duane Wege

Theresa Ladwig made three quilts using the "Flags and Shields" pattern. According to family history she was saying, "I am American and proud of it."
politics

Embroidered Quilt, ca. 1900
Maker Unknown • Harveyville, Kansas • Collection of Pauline Stauffer

Some quilt makers recorded their political leanings in their quilts. However, this was not common. An embroidered quilt made around 1900 in Harveyville includes portraits of Republican presidents. This could have been motivated by politics or patriotism.

Sunflower, 1936
By Carrie Josephine Reed
Sullivan, Indiana
Collection of Amy W. Reed

In 1936, Kansas governor Alf Landon was the Republican presidential candidate. To lend her support to the cause, quilt maker Carrie Reed made a “Sunflower” quilt, a pattern symbolic of Kansas.
White Ribbon, 1932
By Pearl Thompson Davidson • Webber, Kansas • Collection of June Marcellus

In 1932, debate over repeal of national prohibition was at its peak. Pearl Thompson Davidson, an active lecturer for the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, voiced her concerns through this quilt. The white ribbon was an emblem of the WCTU. Pearl collected signature blocks for the quilt at different stops on her lecture circuit.
Selected Readings


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