

THESIS

A ROMANCE REVISITED: QUILTMaking IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Submitted by

Angela Hodapp

Department of English

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Spring 2010

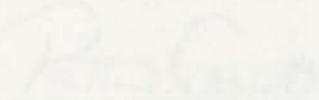
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY


February 22, 2010

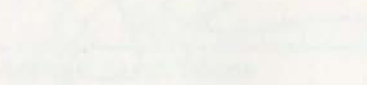
WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY ANGELA HODAPP ENTITLED A ROMANCE REVERTED: QUILTMaking IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BE ACCEPTED AS THE FINAL IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS.

Copyright by Angela Hodapp 2010

All Rights Reserved



Patricia Campbell


Angela Hodapp


Department Chair

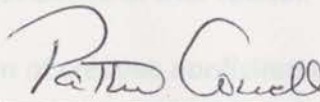
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

A ROMANCE REVISITED: QUILTMaking IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

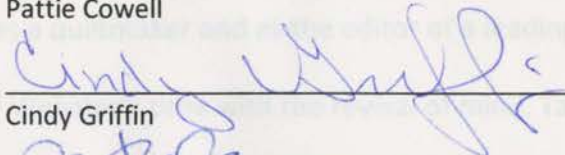
February 22, 2010

WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY ANGELA HODAPP ENTITLED A ROMANCE REVISITED: QUILTMaking IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS.

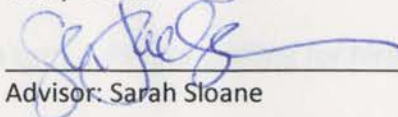
Committee on Graduate work



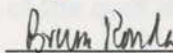
Pattie Cowell



Cindy Griffin



Advisor: Sarah Sloane



Department Chair: Bruce Ronda

Angela Hodapp
Department of English
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523
Spring 2010

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

A ROMANCE REVISITED: QUILTMaking IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The first twentieth-century American quilt revival lasted from the century's earliest years through the Depression; the second—the current revival—began around the time of America's bicentennial in 1976. In 1915, author Marie D. Webster identified three hallmarks of the revival of her time. She claimed that the increasing demand for competent quilters, the desire for new quilt patterns, and the growing popularity of quilt exhibitions were evidence of that revival.

In this collection of creative nonfiction essays, which are largely based on my personal experiences as a quiltermaker and as the editor of a leading quilt magazine, I compare the revival of Webster's time with the revival of mine. Taking each of Webster's hallmarks in turn, I discuss quilting for hire; the mechanization of quilting; the commercialization of the quilt industry; intellectual property rights as they apply to quilts; the ethics of entering, producing, and judging quilt contests; and predictions for the future of quilting in America.

Angela Hodapp
Department of English
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523
Spring 2010

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my husband, Jon Rasmussen, who encouraged me to complete my degree and helped me find the time to do so. I also wish to thank my parents, Stephen and D. Ione Hodapp, who encouraged me in all things, always. I especially wish to thank Dr. Sarah Sloane, who gave my ideas a shape to fill, then turned me loose to fill it. Without her guidance, this thesis would not have been possible.

PREFACE

About a year ago, I paid seven dollars at a used book sale for a tattered copy of the 1935 book *The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt in America* by Carrie A. Hall and Rose G. Kretsinger. This was one of the first writings about quilts not intended to give country patchworkers advice about pattern and color and technique; instead, it attempted to elevate quilts as important cultural artifacts that help tell the story of women's domestic arts. Despite the authors' flowery language and broad generalizations, I was intrigued by their accounts of the "twentieth-century revival" of interest in quilts, so I went on to read Marie D. Webster's *Quilts: Their Story and How to Make Them*, first published twenty years earlier in 1915. As I read these books, I found myself thinking either, "That's so different today," or, "That hasn't changed at all," and I started taking notes.

At first, I was struck by the idealized image these authors fashioned of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century quiltmakers—stalwart pioneer women standing on sun-scorched prairies, shaking fists full of calico patches at the unforgiving sky and declaring, "At least I still have my needle!" I wondered if writing such romantic descriptions of hardship, and the overcoming of it, made these early historians feel

more connected to their foremothers. Perhaps the authors felt that their own affection for quilts somehow empowered them to conquer whatever adversities they faced.

Whatever the reason, it bothered me. The tableau of this mythical quilter has long since been proven to be a rather small piece of the whole picture. Many early American quilters were quite wealthy—they had to be to afford the cottons and silks imported from England and the Far East—and their stitching was evidence of their leisure time.

Furthermore, these authors wrote quite decisively about the prevalence of patchwork quilts in colonial homes—another myth. The earliest American quilts were whole-cloth quilts, often plain white, or they were made of imported Indian chintz or of large panels printed in New England with urns of flowers, garlands, wreathes, and birds in the style of Indian chintz. These gave way to appliquéd quilts—patched quilts emerged a few decades later.

How did these authors get away with publishing their misimpressions of quilt history? How could they so casually pass off their romantic assumptions as fact?

Then it occurred to me.

They were, in a sense, writing creative nonfiction.

When I started the communication development program in 2000, one option for the final project or thesis was a work of creative nonfiction. This appealed to me, but what would I write about? I didn't know.

After I completed my coursework, I left campus and began working in publishing. Now, nearly ten years later, I am the editor-in-chief of *Quilters Newsletter*, a magazine

with a forty-year publication history and a current circulation of 150,000. I have spent the last six years making quilts and the last four years immersed in quilt culture. I read about quilts. I talk to quilters. I teach others to quilt. I attend quilt events, museum openings, and lectures. And I write about quilts. The best part about what I do is that I know that what I write today, what I choose to publish in *Quilters Newsletter*, and what I have written on the following pages will be part of the vast collection of quilt-related literature that will be available to quilt historians a century from now.

This thesis is a work of creative nonfiction. Like the works of Hall, Kretsinger, and Webster, it is personal. It is imbued with my own impressions of the world of quilts based on what I understand to be true about that world today. My hope is that one hundred years from now, someone who loves quilts will read the books I have read, will read the essays I have written, and will be inspired to add her own voice to the enduring story of quilts.

Anything so intimately bound up in the history of a country will
reappear from time to time in popularity.

—Carrie A. Hall,

The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt in America, 1935

Chapter 1: Why Quilts Matter	1
Chapter 2: The Increasing Demand for Patchwork Quilts	30
Chapter 3: The Desire for New Quilt Patterns	47
Chapter 4: The Growing Popularity of Quilt Exhibitions	54
Chapter 5: The Future of Collaborating in America	85
Works Cited	87

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Why Quilts Matter.....	1
Chapter 2: The Increasing Demand for Competent Quilters.....	30
Chapter 3: The Desire for New Quilt Patterns.....	47
Chapter 4: The Growing Popularity of Quilt Exhibitions.....	68
Chapter 5: The Future of Quiltmaking in America.....	86
Works Cited.....	97

Chapter 1

Why Quilts Matter

In 2005, I bewildered my parents by quitting my stable, full-time job to work in a quilt shop for an hourly wage and a twenty-five percent employee discount. No more health insurance or profit sharing, no more 401K or flex-spending account, no more paid vacations or sick leave. Just me, five other part-timers, and an old farmhouse stuffed to the rafters with fabric.

My mother, I think, was particularly perplexed. I was the youngest of her three children and the most difficult to raise. The uncooperative and spoiled wild child, I spent my summers sunburned, practicing back handsprings in the yard, running through the sprinklers, riding my bike until sundown. It was my sister's sensibilities that more closely matched Mom's. The two of them shared a love of all things yesteryear—yellowed lace table runners, Depression glass, wooden darning eggs, ivory brooches, rusty metal water pitchers, tarnished filigree letter openers, sepia-toned photographs of stoic ancestors in heavy wooden frames.

And quilts.

That I would not only be the one to take up the craft that she herself had mastered long ago, but that I would also gamble my livelihood on it, left my mother at a loss.

* * *

Swinging by an antique store on the way home from the supermarket was a dirty trick my mother used to play on me in the days when I'd ride along to help with the groceries. The car would turn left out of the parking lot, not right, and I'd groan and press my temple to the window. "Just let me out here," I'd plead. "I'll walk home."

The shops and flea markets she frequented disgusted me. Jumbles of junk spilled out of a series of alcoves bordered by old hi-fis and chests of drawers with oval vanity mirrors into a maze of aisles and walkways. These were laid out with mismatched squares of filthy carpet to give shoppers at least some idea of how to find their way back to the front of the store—as if the smell of the proprietor's cigarette weren't enough to guide them. And the cigarette wasn't the worst of it. Everything smelled, from the tiniest silver thimble and the brittle pages of the paperbacks to the vinyl-headed baby dolls and a massive set of black bedroom furniture so gothic and funereal that I couldn't tear my horrified eyes away from it. Every object carried a history made up of its previous owner's memories, condensed and particulate, rising into the air to mingle into a single stifling stench.

"You have to be patient to find a treasure," my mom would whisper to me as she stepped carefully over this pile to sift through that. "Then you'll know it when you see it."

I had no doubt that what she said was true, and despite the hand I kept cupped over my nose and mouth, I understood about history. I understood that, for my mother, the treasure hunt was about spinning a thread that connected her heart to her past—and I understand now that that thread reached farther back to her mother's past, to her grandmother's past, to the way things were, and to the ache over the way things could have been.

Sulky teenager though I was, I also understood at the time that Mom only opened her billfold under two conditions. First, her find had to be truly special; it had to resonate in her heart. Second, it had to be priced right. "They have no idea what this is really worth," she'd say with a conspiratorial smile as she considered the little handwritten price tag. That would usually perk me right up. Mom knew her stuff, and I liked the idea that having smarts could net a person a break. This was how my mother filled our house with treasures.

* * *

It was around that time that Mom started making quilts. I have no idea whether she had always known how—I assume she had, since Grandma made quilts—but my childhood is divided into the time before there were quilts in the house and the time after. It was like a switch had been flipped. A giant, green cutting mat and a "don't-touch-that" super-sharp rotary cutter found a home on our dining room table, and later in the bedroom my sister vacated when she went off to college. Stacks and stacks of neatly folded fabric seemed to multiply in every available corner of every available closet, and still more came home in plastic bags.

These were shopping excursions I didn't mind being a part of. I liked fabric stores. I knew my way around them. My mom had made all my clothing for years—up until I entered junior high and insisted I would only wear store-bought clothes—and I had often been allowed to choose my own patterns and fabrics. I even made a skirt or two for myself, once Mom showed me how to sew on her old Kenmore, and I was adept at turning the scraps into ragdolls and their clothing. But quilt shops were different. The fabric was all 100 percent cotton, all the same weight and texture. It was the color and the printed design that made each bolt unique. I loved the way the bolts were grouped by color, making a giant rainbow that stretched from one side of the store to the other. Still, as much as I enjoyed running my fingers over the fabric, it never occurred to me to ask Mom to teach me to make a quilt.

Along with the stash of fabric expanding inside the walls of our home grew a quilting library. Mom bought dozens of secondhand books about quilts and subscribed to magazines like *Quilters Newsletter*—“the magazine for quilt lovers” according to the tagline on the front cover of every issue. It was on the covers of *Quilters Newsletter* that I saw for the first time what quilts could be. They could just as easily be vibrant, complicated, and contemporary as they could be the drab and scrappy *Little House on the Prairie*-type bedcoverings that sprang to my mind whenever I heard the word “quilt.” I liked to flip through Mom's library and look at all the quilt blocks, wonder how each got its name. There was a history there I knew nothing about, but there was also a vocabulary I was fast absorbing without even realizing it: *fat quarter*, *quarter-inch seam*, *strip piecing*, *paper piecing*, *chain piecing*, *four patch*, *nine patch*,

stitch-in-the-ditch. When I did make my first quilt some fifteen years later, I found myself drawing from a well of words and meanings I knew perfectly but didn't remember learning—a dormant language I had only to teach my fingers.

* * *

After all three of us kids moved out and Mom and Dad were left to rearrange their empty nest, Mom moved her quilt studio downstairs into the family room. Across the wall above the window, she painted the following words in sepia-colored paint: "I made quilts as fast as I could to keep my family warm and as pretty as I could to keep my heart from breaking."

At first, I thought this was Mom's personal declaration, and I was confused. But she explained that it was a quote she had read in a book, the words of a nineteenth-century homesteader. It was a melancholy sentiment—matter-of-fact and lacking any joy or peace—and I wondered why she had chosen it to be her own anthem. Every time she sat down at her sewing machine to work on a quilt, the words of the long-dead woman stretched out above my mother's head like a confession. But a confession of what?

It was no secret to me that pioneer women made patchwork quilts out of necessity, putting to use every scrap of fabric they had available, which included their families' outgrown and threadbare clothing. The nicest patches in a quilt were the bits leftover from dressmaking. The luxury of purchasing yardage for the express purpose of cutting it up and patching it back together with pieces of lesser quality fabric was not only foreign to these women, but it was as unimaginable as washing machines and

microwave ovens. At least, that was my impression at the time and what I held to be another piece of common knowledge I had absorbed simply by being the daughter of a quiltmaker.

Impression or not, I had a gap to jump. Beyond the making of quilts, what did my twentieth-century mother have in common with this nineteenth-century pioneer? Their lives were worlds apart, their reasons for making quilts vastly different. What familiarity did my mother feel that was strong enough to incite her to paint these words on her wall?

* * *

In 2003, I was working as an operations director and publications manager for a small, conservative consulting firm. The executive director patrolled the hallways at 8:01 a.m. to ensure that everyone was seated and work focused; she asked every morning, and again every afternoon, to see employees' daily prioritized task lists; she required everyone in manager- or director-level positions to keep a "leadership journal" and to share the things we wrote inside with each other during weekly staff meetings; if work was slow, she signed us up for assorted offsite seminars and workshops designed to improve our efficiency, productivity, and project-management and communication skills.

I was miserable.

One autumn day, a coworker and I skipped out of work early on some now-forgotten pretense. I wanted to hit the mall and do some shoe shopping. That was fine with Marianne, but she asked if I would mind stopping by the quilt shop first. She was

making a quilt for her parents' anniversary, she explained, and she needed to pick up some thread.

This was surprising news. Marianne was only thirty-three or thirty-four—she was too young to make quilts. I said to Marianne then what I've now heard, in variation, from dozens of people since that October day: "Oh, you make quilts. *My mother is a quiltmaker.*" Sometimes it's *grandmother*, and sometimes it's *was*. But no matter the deviation, it has always been clear to me that quiltmaking has skipped a generation or two.

In the quilt shop that afternoon with Marianne, I was conflicted. While I felt like I didn't belong there—it was, after all, an old-lady kind of a place—it was utterly familiar. It was like walking into an elementary school years after graduation and being hit by the smell of paste and pencil shavings, the sight of desks all lined up in rows, dusty sticks of chalk in the tray under the blackboard. Every sense tells you that you are nine again. I couldn't help but touch the fabrics, as if I could, as if I *had to*, mainline all that color right through my fingertips straight into my bloodstream. Something under the surface was beginning to stir. I bought a quarter yard of two prints, one orange and one yellow, completely in the dark about what I would do with them.

That weekend, I dug my old sewing machine out of storage and took it into a dealer for a cleaning and a tune-up. The machine, an old Baby Lock, had been my high-school graduation gift, one that I had asked for and had been excited to receive. I had it in my head that I would make my own clothing for college, maybe even some throw pillows or curtains for my dorm room. Freshman year is the best opportunity a young

woman has to reinvent herself, and even then I knew my ability to sew would set me apart, since sewing machines had already begun to disappear from American high schools by 1991, along with faculty who knew how to teach garment-making and mending. I had entrepreneurial visions of other freshmen girls clamoring for my fashion-design and home-decoration production services. I would sew between classes, make new friends, and fatten up my bank account.

It didn't happen that way, of course. I did sew a thing or two during college—pants that didn't fit quite right or shirts for which I had chosen fabric that didn't drape as the pattern maker had intended—but the machine ended up packed away. When the technician I had hired to fix up my machine took it out of its case, he found more than a decade's worth of grime jamming the internal mechanisms and broken parts for which replacements had to be ordered directly from the factory. Still, he returned it to me clean, well oiled, and ready to work.

I set the machine up on the end of my dining room table, wound a new bobbin, inserted a new needle, threaded the machine, and laid my right foot on the foot pedal. I wondered what to do next.

I was done with making garments—that much I knew. Modifying a pattern to ensure a proper fit was a mystery, and it was too expensive and disappointing to keep making duds. But quilts were two-dimensional and decorative and difficult, I thought at the time, to screw up. Because I had no mat or rotary cutter, I used scissors to cut two lopsided squares, one from the orange print and one from the yellow. I stacked them one on top of the other and ran them under the needle. The machine made a satisfying

whir as the feed dogs pulled the patches under the presser foot. And then it was done. I took my foot off the pedal, clipped the threads, and opened the patches like a book to see what the seam looked like.

It was perfect.

To describe the click that sounded in my brain at that moment would require knowledge of neurology that I just don't have. I'm sure it was the result of a micro shot of the biochemicals responsible for elevating one's mood. I saw that perfect, straight seam joining those two patches, and I wanted to make another one. Immediately.

Maybe the best way to convey the mystery of it is to tell you this: I earned an A in high school geometry without really trying. It's just the way my brain works. Geometry is about precision. It is about studying shapes and angles, seeing patterns, recognizing congruencies, choosing the correct formula for the problem at hand, and applying it to find the missing piece of information. That, I think, was, and *is*, the reason quiltmaking gives me such a rush: it satisfies both the right and left side of the brain at once. It is art for people who can't help but measure.

I picked up the phone and dialed. "Mom," I said. "I'm going to make a quilt."

* * *

During the next two years, my free time and my spending money were devoted almost solely to this new passion. I gave my old machine to a friend's teenage daughter and bought a \$4,000 computerized Bernina that purred like a kitten and came complete with a free-motion stitch regulator. With every quilt I made, I challenged myself to use a different palette and to choose increasingly difficult-to-piece blocks. I borrowed

instructional and pictorial books from Mom and went to local quilt shows with Marianne. It was Marianne who told me there were two places to see quilts displayed in Golden, Colorado, just a few miles west of my home in Denver. The Rocky Mountain Quilt Museum was the third museum established exclusively for the display of quilts. It was founded in 1990 by Golden resident Eugenia Mitchell (1903-2006), who seeded the museum's permanent collection with 101 quilts she herself had either made or collected. Another quilt gallery in Golden was located in the lobby of *Quilters Newsletter* magazine's editorial offices.

I couldn't believe it. The magazine long considered the quilter's bible was published right in my backyard. In fact, the same office also published *Quiltmaker* magazine and *McCall's Quilting* magazine.

"Why are we still working here?" I asked Marianne over lunch one day. We both had backgrounds in publishing—she in music publishing and I in literary and educational publishing. We were both avid quilters, and we were both unhappy in our current jobs.

"Simple," she replied. "Quilting is my hobby. If I make it my work, I'll come to hate it."

I understood her point of view, but I knew it wasn't the same for me. I started watching the magazines' websites for job openings, but nothing ever came up. Once a person was lucky enough to land a job there, I imagined, they didn't leave until they retired. So I fantasized more and more about other possibilities for making a living in the quilting industry. But doing what? Selling my original quilt patterns? Designing fabric? I

even considered financing a computerized longarm machine and starting a quilting-for-hire business.

Then one day, I Googled “quilt job Denver” and something came up. Harriet’s Treadle Arts was looking for a store manager.

Harriet Hargrave has long been considered the fairy godmother of machine quilting. In the late seventies, under the watchful eye of her mother, Harriet hand quilted an entire queen-sized quilt, and then promptly swore she would never do it again. She found hand quilting tedious and time consuming. She knew that machine piecing had become more or less standard among quiltmakers of the time, but why not machine quilting?

The answer was pretty obvious. The small, neat stitches one could make only by hand ensured that the thread would be effectively invisible once the quilt was complete. Only the quilting pattern, as it played out in light and shadow across the surface of the quilt, would be seen—a soft-sculpted design element that was just as important to the beauty of the finished quilt as the maker’s choice of fabric and patchwork design. Done on a machine, the quilting leaves a stark, ugly line of thread across both the top and bottom of the quilt—less problematic on an all-white whole-cloth quilt than on a patchwork quilt. On patchwork, the machine quilting fades and then reappears across the quilt’s top, on-again-off-again as its color blends with some patches but stands out against others.

It wasn’t that quilts had never been quilted on machines. In fact, machine quilting can be found on many beautiful nineteenth-century quilts. Well-known antique

quilt dealer Mary Koval explains that women of the day who could afford home sewing machines enjoyed using them for everything—piecing, appliqué, quilting, binding—because their finished quilts proved their affluence. Despite this, Koval says that prospective buyers still accuse her of asking too much for machine-made antiques, evidence that hand-quilted work is still considered intrinsically more valuable.

Determined to find a way to make quilting more efficient, Harriet began to experiment with different materials and techniques, eventually settling upon a successful combination she calls hand quilting with an electric needle. But in the early 1980s, she was not allowed to share her work, or her techniques, at her local guild's show-and-tell—she was told the guild's members were only interested in seeing hand-quilted quilts. Nonplussed, she wrote up her process and published the first edition of *Heirloom Machine Quilting* in 1987. The book, now published by C&T Publishing, is in its fourth edition and is still considered the most groundbreaking and comprehensive reference guide for machine quilters. Today, decades later, Harriet still spends half her time on the road, traveling to teach guilds around the world not only machine quilting, but also precision piecing and machine appliqué.

In addition to having several bestselling books about the making of quilts to her credit, Harriet owns and operates the Denver area's oldest quilt shop. She and her mother opened Harriet's Treadle Arts in 1981, cleverly including the word "treadle" in their shop's name not only because it invoked nostalgia by calling to mind the old-style treadle sewing machines used generations ago, but also because it represented Harriet's intention to popularize machine quilting.

Later the same day I saw the job advertised online, I drove over to the shop and dropped off a resume. Two days after that, I quit my job and went to work for Harriet Hargrave.

* * *

Working for Harriet was the best education in quiltmaking I could have hoped for. While I had learned much by trying out techniques I read about in books and magazines—as well as by watching reruns of *Simply Quilts*, a much-missed show hosted by Alex Anderson that was cancelled in 2005—I was now totally immersed in the world of quilts.

Helping customers choose fabrics taught me patience and the importance of trusting my own instincts. Many shopped with little cardboard color wheels, pulling bolts off the shelves and lugging them to the front of the store, where they hoped the natural light that streamed in through the windows would help them see the fabrics' true colors. They muttered words like “triad” and “complementary” and “analogous” and rejected outright any fabric we suggested that didn't fit into whatever scheme they were shopping for. At first, I worried that I had not paid such close attention to choosing colors in my own quilts, but Harriet's philosophy set me at ease. She rolled her eyes at such prudence and told her customers, “Put some fabrics next to each other and stand back. If you like what you see, you've made a good choice.”

Harriet's thinking was born out of her love for antique quilts, made by women who had no quilt shops, no color wheels, no formal art training, yet who still managed to do beautiful work. One corner of her shop was devoted to reproduction fabrics—

chintz and toile from late eighteenth-century, pinks and browns from the early nineteenth century, indigos and tans and dusty blue-grays from the Civil War, and pastel feedsack prints from the Depression. Manufacturers who offer reproduction fabrics replicate as accurately as possible the original printed motifs in the original colors, two elements that depended on what printing methods were practiced and what dyestuffs were available in the ever-changing textile industry of the U.S., Great Britain, and the Far East. Turkey reds, poison greens, muddy purples, cheddary golds, Pepto-Bismol double-pinks—many colors prevalent in Harriet's reproduction corner were just plain ugly, according to the sensibilities of contemporary quiltmakers. But the more able I became to place a fabric into its appropriate era based on its print and color, and the more I saw how Harriet used these fabrics in her own quilts—freely, unsystematically—the greater my appreciation for old-looking quilts became.

Helping customers also taught me how to figure yardage. Many of today's quiltmakers stick to kits—they don't trust their own color sense, and they are not interested in doing the math required to design their own patchwork patterns. A kit quilt solves both problems. Harriet, however, refused to sell kits. She pushed her students and customers to think like the quiltmakers of their grandmothers' generation and make one-of-a-kind quilts based on what they liked, what they had, and what they knew how to do. As a result, her customers were more adventurous than those who frequented other shops—but they still needed a little help now and then. If someone wanted to modify a published pattern to make a queen-sized quilt instead of a twin-sized one, I had to know how to help her refigure the yardage for each fabric. This was

important—you got one shot to figure accurately. If that customer came back a month later because she was an eighth of a yard short of just one fabric, her chance of finding it still available was slim.

One time, I had sewn a single quilt block to drape over the display of a new fabric collection; showing how fabrics looked in a block was the surest way to sell them quickly. A woman came in to look for fabric for her daughter's wedding quilt, and when she saw the block I had sewn, she insisted that it was exactly what she had in mind. I spent the next ninety minutes with her, drafting a king-sized quilt based on this little block, noting all the correct measurements for each patch she needed to cut, sketching assembly diagrams, and figuring the yardage she would need to buy for each print. It was a \$250 sale. This was exciting for the store's bottom line, but more pleasing to me was that someone liked my design well enough to spend that kind of money on it and that I had enjoyed the drafting and figuring that intimidated so many quilters.

The on-the-floor experience was an education in itself, but infinitely more valuable to my development as a quiltmaker were Harriet's classes. I learned how to appliqué by machine in a one-day workshop and how to quilt by machine during a four-day retreat. I also took a class called the Art of Classic Quiltmaking, a six-session series class that met every other week. Every session required the making of a quilt top. The first session was a lecture about the production and care of fabric. This left a few students restless and itchy fingered—they thought they would be sewing right off the bat—but I was fascinated. It's as fundamental for a quiltmaker to know fabric as it is for a carpenter to know wood. She must know that not all fabrics are woven identically and

what will happen when she stitches a loosely woven fabric to a tightly woven one. She must know how to straighten out the distortion that happens when the fabric is wound onto a bolt board and that each fabric will react differently to light and water and soap and wear. But she must also have fun. If it's not fun, Harriet reminded us, then why do it?

During my time at Harriet's, I found myself drawn more and more to the reproduction fabrics as well as to the quilt history books that Harriet stocked in that part of the shop. But it wasn't just antique quilts I was beginning to appreciate—it was all things that had a history. How odd. I remembered my involuntary trips to Mom's favorite antique shops and tapped into a new understanding, something that was tying me more securely to my own history and to the lives of my ancestors. I felt as though I had finally discovered the very thing that had drawn my mother to quilts and their making—only I had come by it through the back door. I had learned to make quilts first, had fallen in love with the feel of fabric between my fingers, had found comfort in the hum of my machine, before I had fully appreciated the rich history quilts carried and the power they had to erase the lines between generations.

Despite the deeper connection I was starting to feel for my new passion, and my new vocation, I was horrified to realize that most people did not value quilts the way I did. Every day, people prepare to move their furniture by wrapping it in the quilts their grandmothers made; they lay those quilts under the car before changing the oil; they line storage boxes with those quilts to protect their valuables, never stopping to think that the quilts themselves are precious records of their families' histories. Why? The

diminishing value of the homemade quilt was made even more evident when, on occasion, some non-quilter would enter Harriet's store and inquire about hiring someone to make them a quilt that they could give a new mother, a new bride, a new graduate. Often with very specific ideas about what this quilt should look like, these would-be customers proclaimed with an almost benevolent air that they were willing to spend up to \$50 on the making of such a gift—twice what they would spend on a mass-produced patchwork comforter at Wal-Mart. Once they learned that this would not even cover half the cost of the fabric, and that the meager hourly rate of \$10 would add at least another \$200 to the bottom line for even the simplest of patchwork patterns, bringing their total for the quilt top alone to around \$300, they would leave in a hurry. Had they stuck around, they would have learned that the cost of the batting, backing fabric, thread, and basic machine-quilting and finishing services could easily chalk up yet another \$300.

There is an irony in this. What was once the definitive symbol of making do on the American frontier had become an exceptionally pricey proposition. According to *The National Survey of Quilting in America 2006*, a triennial survey conducted by NFO Research, Inc. and DP Research Solutions, the love for the craft has elevated the value of the U.S. quilting market to \$3.3 billion (3). It is quite lucrative in foreign countries as well, most notably in Japan, Australia, France, and the U.K. Quiltmakers in these and other countries have adopted the basics of American quiltmaking, but have applied the aesthetics of their own cultures to make entirely new variations on a theme so that now the trained eye can look at quilts hanging in an international show and immediately

recognize the subtleties that differentiate a Japanese-made quilt from an Australian-made one.

I began to think more critically about the quilt industry, which, I concluded, was completely self-contained. It thrived because more and more people wanted to learn the craft, and they needed to buy materials. But outside the industry, there was little appreciation for the time, effort, artistry, and workmanship that went into the making of a quilt. Only people who valued the process valued the product.

There were exceptions, of course—customers determined to learn quiltmaking not for their own enjoyment, but to finish something long left incomplete by another. We had customers who brought in hallowed rags recently discovered in a great-aunt's attic and sought advice about how to repair the disintegrated patches; customers who wanted to assemble the stack of blocks their great-grandmother had pieced and needed help selecting an era-appropriate fabric for the sashings and borders; and customers who wondered if it was suitable to machine quilt the antique, hand-pieced top they recently bought for \$2 at their church's jumble sale. Everyone, I realized, had her own reason for taking on the challenge making a quilt, and no one reason was more or less valid than another. But what did they have in common?

* * *

After a year spent working for Harriet, I left to accept a position as an editor at *Quilters Newsletter* magazine. This was one of my life's most mystifying transitions. I had been working at the shop one very busy spring day and had spent the morning rather depressed that I was a thirty-something woman working in a low-paying retail

job. The fact that I had found few opportunities in the quilt industry to improve my financial situation had prompted me to reinstate my Colorado teaching license, and I was job hunting on the sly, anticipating, not entirely cheerfully, a return to the public-school classroom in a few short months. I was also grouchy that day because it had been so busy that I had not had a chance to eat my lunch until two in the afternoon.

Famished, I retreated into the back room, leaving Linda and Kari, two part-timers, to help customers. When the phone rang a few minutes later, however, Kari ended up giving the frustrated caller a free half-hour private lesson on machine appliqué.

Panicked, Linda poked her head into the back room, apologized for interrupting my break, and asked me to help her with customers until Kari could get off the phone. I begrudgingly left my half-eaten sandwich on the table and trudged out onto the floor to tear fabric and run the register.

When the caller was satisfied that she knew enough to continue with her quilt, Kari set the cordless down on the cutting table next to me and declared that she was done answering calls for the rest of the day. On cue, the phone rang. My mind still on my lunch, I answered.

"Thank you for calling Harriet's Treadle Arts. How may I help you?"

"Is Debbie there?" asked the caller.

We had no one named Debbie working at the shop and, to the best of my knowledge, we never had. I did know that Harriet had a friend by that name, and I asked if that was the Debbie the caller wanted to speak to. It was.

"She moved to Spokane about a year ago," I said. "Is there something I can help you with?"

"Oh, I'm sorry to bother you," said the caller. "This is Pam from *Quilters Newsletter*. I met Debbie once in a class at Harriet's, and she said she would be interested in working at the magazine if we ever had a position open up in our editorial department. You don't happen to know anyone who would be interested, do you?"

I left Harriet's as quickly as I had come in. In two days, I had taken the magazine's editorial test as well as the yardage-figuring and pattern-writing test. The latter I could never have passed without the experience I had gained from working at the shop, and pass I did. I was offered the job, and I accepted. It was meant to be—it must have been! How else could the events of that day have put me in that exact place at that exact time? It had to have been a busy day at the shop, or I would not have been asked to help out on the floor. Kari had to have taken that call from the frustrated quilter, the call that not only prompted Linda to ask me for help, but also swore Kari off the phone for the rest of the day. And neither Kari nor Linda knew who Debbie was. Had either of them answered the call from *Quilters Newsletter*, there would likely have been no conversation. They would have told Pam that she had a wrong number, or, had Pam gotten as far as to explain the purpose of her call, they would have said that, no, they didn't know anyone interested in becoming an editor at the magazine. As far as they knew, I wanted to teach English to middle schoolers.

As an editor at the *Quilters Newsletter*, I became part of a forty-year legacy. The first issue of the magazine was published by Bonnie Leman in 1969. A young mother looking for a way to make some money while staying home with her children, Bonnie typed the entire issue at her kitchen table and had five thousand copies printed and sent out for free to anyone who might be interested in purchasing a subscription—\$1.75 for six issues per year. (The editorial letter in her second issue reported an excellent response to the first, and with great enthusiasm, Bonnie upped the offer to \$3.50 for twelve issues per year or \$6.00 for a two-year subscription.)

As the founding editor of *Quilters Newsletter* magazine, Bonnie Leman was undoubtedly one of the most significant figures who steered the course of the late twentieth-century quilt revival. Her influence on the industry, even four decades later, remains revered and undisputed. After the Depression, quilting went underground. Few housewives during the 1950s were attracted to homemade things when department store goods were in vogue and their purchase was proof of affluence. Consequently, few daughters growing up in the 1960s and 1970s were taught to quilt. Still, there were those who had kept the tradition alive and had passed on their knowledge. By 1976, the patriotism and nostalgia surrounding the bicentennial prompted Americans to revisit heritage crafts and pastimes, and the patchwork quilt became symbolic of the values and sacrifices upon which they believed their nation had been founded. More to the point, quilts lent magnitude to the roles of women in the scope of that glorious history, and the practice of making quilts boomed with an energy not seen since the Depression. After the nearly forty-year gap in the history of American

quilts, there was a new readership substantial enough to make the publication of a quilting magazine a viable business opportunity, and Bonnie was the first to seize that opportunity.

The first readers drank in every word Bonnie wrote, every pattern she designed. They were in disbelief. Were there really enough quilters out there to warrant a whole magazine published just for them? At the time, a woman who decided she wanted to make a quilt had two choices. She could seek out someone to teach her—often a neighbor or an aunt, if Mother and Grandmother did not know how—or she could rely on trial and error and teach herself. There were no quilt shops offering classes, and what precious few books remained on library shelves were tattered, had poor photographs or illustrations, if any, and presented only hand techniques. Suddenly quiltmakers had a magazine with fresh, new content delivered to their doors twelve times per year. Though the visual aids in those early issues were rudimentary by today's standards, they taught quiltmakers new techniques and provided patterns not only for the vintage quilts they treasured, but also for more contemporary quilts. The magazine quickly became known as the bible of quiltmaking and earned the lofty reputation as the only source qualified to provide both the first and last word on how to do quiltmaking right.

Although Bonnie founded the first magazine for quiltmakers, she was not the first editor credited with setting the tastes of the American needleworker. In her book *Clues in the Calico: A Guide to Identifying and Dating Antique Quilts*, Barbara Brackman cites an article titled "Bedrooms and Beds" that was published in an 1874 issue of *The*

Household magazine. The anonymous author wrote, "Neither the unhealthy thing called a comfortable [sic] nor the unsightly covering known as a patched quilt should be seen on a bed in this day" (26). The author of another article Brackman found, this one published in *Arthur's Home Magazine* in 1883, noted with disgust that "3/4 of the bed coverings of our people consists [sic] of what are miscalled 'comfortables'" (26).

Editors' denunciation of the homemade bedcovering as both an unsightly article of a common household and a menace to public health did somewhat alter the craft's popularity during the decades immediately following the Civil War. Many American patchworkers began to copy the British and made a glut of crazy quilts—heavily hand-embroidered parlor throws that married jewel-toned silks, satins, and velvets in a haphazard fashion, demonstrating the Victorian sensibility that more was more and often resulting in an overworked, gaudy effect. Traditional forms of the craft were suddenly considered a waste of time, something done by poor folks for the purposes of keeping warm. Brackman also points out that the 1890-1891 Montgomery Ward catalog listed plain wool blankets from \$2 to \$8, but offered quilts for as little as sixty-five cents. "When considering the relative value of quilts versus blankets," Brackman writes, "one has to factor in the time required to make a quilt, but during this era, the time spent in sewing and assembling the three layers was minimal. Quilts, in the post-Civil War years, did become the cheap bedding that the myths now describe" (26).

Then, at the turn of the century, magazine columns written by women who made quilts set an entirely new trend. These writers championed a new quilt aesthetic. A color-coordinated palette of soft pastels replaced the dark calico scraps leftover from

dressmaking and often required the purchase of yardage specifically for the making of a quilt. For the first time, writers were evaluating quilts based on the harmony and balance of the design, and quiltmakers were taking notice and following along.

fashion, home decoration, and craft * * *

Of course, much of this trendsetting was commercially motivated. If writers could steer the aesthetic values of the quilting population, they could better predict what patterns would sell. Furthermore, they could sell kits of fabric to go with those patterns. And editors who regularly published these writers could sell more magazines, as quiltmakers clamored to consult the experts about what was stylish and tasteful before they began to stitch their next quilts.

A century later, not much has changed—other than that quiltmakers today are flooded with books and magazines about every facet of quilting imaginable, and that the Internet and the blogosphere have made it possible for hundreds, maybe even thousands, of quiltmakers to style themselves as experts on some aspect of the craft. But the question remains. Are trends organic, driven by what the masses want or esteem at a particular moment in time, or are they more controlled, directed by the media based on the deepest well of advertising dollars available or on some other profit-making opportunity?

I believe it's the latter, and here's why. In 2009, we published an article called "Hot Trends, Cool Colors" by Luana Rubin. The owner of one of the most successful and well-known online fabric stores, Luana has the attention of every manufacturer in the world that produces fabric for quilters. Get Luana interested in just one of your new

fabric collections, and she'll buy enough of it to keep your company afloat for the rest of the season. Luana is a smart buyer and savvy businesswoman, and she's also a member of the Color Marketing Group, an international collective of decision makers in the fashion, home decoration, and craft industries. Each year, as Luana explains in her article, the group meets to plan what will be the "in" colors next year, the year after that, and the year after that. By planning ahead and coming to a consensus, these industry leaders can be sure that their companies are designing and manufacturing now what will be in demand in the future. It's been working this way for decades—absolute proof of blind consumerism. If you build it, they will come.

When I read the rough draft of Luana's article, I felt a little disillusioned. Here I thought that we magazine editors existed to seek out and publish things our audience wanted to read, to think about, or to discuss with other likeminded people. But if the Color Marketing Group's trendsetting model translated to the magazine industry, then I was the trendsetter, and my readers were much less sophisticated than I had given them credit for. If you write it, they will read it, and they will believe it—it was an uncomfortable idea. I preferred to think of our readers, and perhaps of the majority of those involved in any fine arts and crafts community, as outspoken, urbane, confident in their own artistic voices, but also open minded and willing to engage in a larger discourse. That meant that I, as an editor, would always be invited to the party. Anything I said or wrote would become something for our audience to *consider*, not to absorb without some modicum of critical thought.

Of course, it's not that simple. A reader's engagement with a magazine, even a craft magazine, is much more erudite than her approach to choosing a hip color to paint her kitchen walls. However, the role of the editor in the history of the quilt is quite clear, and evidence of editors' influence on quiltmakers' changing aesthetic is easy to trace by correlating early publications with antique quilts that have been cataloged by various state documentation projects throughout the twentieth century.

My preoccupation with these concerns has grown over the last month, as I was recently appointed to the position of editor-in-chief of *Quilters Newsletter* magazine—the fourth editor-in-chief in the magazine's forty-year history. In this new role, I am tasked with maintaining the editorial integrity of the magazine's content—keeping it separate from the influence of advertisers or other industry stakeholders. However, I am also tasked with improving the magazine's bottom line, a number that is as influenced by advertising dollars as it is by the number of paid subscriptions I can attract. It's a fine line to have to walk, especially since our number of subscriptions has slipped over the last five or six years to approximately 150,000. Once you lose a subscriber it's incredibly difficult to get her back.

Under the weight of this fiscal responsibility, I recognize the value of the work of the writers and editors whose pens have guided the evolution of this industry during the last 150 years, and I have to ask myself how I will fit in. I am a writer and an editor, yes, but I am also just one of the 2.7 million quilters in the United States (NFO Research, Inc. and DP Research Solutions 7) who have been profoundly influenced by a love of quilts and quilting, by a respect for the way quilts have figured into their personal

histories, and by an appreciation of the quilt's longstanding role in the American experience. And so, in looking forward to preserving the legacy of *Quilters Newsletter*, I find myself looking back to see where others in my position have found success.

In her 1915 book *Quilts: Their Story and How to Make Them*, Marie D. Webster acknowledges the quiltmaking revival that took place during her time—arguably the last to have occurred before the most recent revival of 1976: “At the present time there is a marked revival of interest in quilts and their making. The evidences of this revival are the increasing demand for competent quilters, the desire for new quilt patterns, and the growing popularity of quilt exhibitions” (136).

How striking! The evidence of a quilt revival, I realized when I first read this passage, were the same one hundred years ago as they are today. To perpetuate the current revival and keep the quilt industry budding out into new branches and leaves—an undertaking that now occupies much of my imagination—I decided to look at each piece of evidence separately, to trace its history during the last century, and to see if I might determine its trajectory.

To begin, I will look at several seminal writings about quilts and their history. Among the most notable of these is Webster's book—the manuscript having been commissioned by Frank Doubleday, the founder and publisher of Doubleday, Page & Co. Doubleday was a friend of Edward Bok, the editor of *The Ladies' Home Journal* from 1889 to 1919, who first recognized Webster's talent as a quilt designer and published fourteen of her original patterns. Today, the restored Marie Webster house in Marion,

Quilters Hall of Fame in 1985. Preserves and Quilters have since been inducted as

Indiana, is the home of the Quilters Hall of Fame, which was established in 1979 and in 2010 will induct its fortieth honoree.

In 1935, Carrie A. Hall and Rose G. Kretsinger collaborated on *The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt in America*. Hall is most known for collecting and cataloging thousands of examples of patchwork quilt blocks made in the 1800s and early 1900s, and black-and-white photographs of her collection are included in this volume. Her narrative proves that she had read Webster's book, for she not only quotes Webster liberally, but she also borrows the same passages Webster had cited from what scarce sources were available at the time. The second half of the book was written by Kretsinger, whose expertise was quilting patterns—as opposed to patchwork patterns.

Quilt study, just like quilting, was stilled during the middle of the twentieth century, but when scholars began again to mention quilts in their published research, many refuted points and speculations made by Webster, Hall, and Kretsinger. Barbara Brackman was one of the first historians to devote herself to studying quilts after the bicentennial revival and wrote *Clues in the Calico: A Guide to Identifying and Dating Antique Quilts* in 1989. She is also the author of the most extensive catalog of historic patchwork and appliqué patterns and an expert on quilts made during the Civil War. Merikay Waldvogel is another prominent historian; her expertise is Depression-era quilting. Among the many books to her credit is *Patchwork Souvenirs of the 1933 World's Fair*, which she wrote with Brackman in 1993.

It is noteworthy that Hall and Kretsinger were posthumously inducted into the Quilters Hall of Fame in 1985; Brackman and Waldvogel have since been inducted as

well and are still among the most highly respected names in quilt study. Their writings will provide a historical foundation for this thesis.

In the collection of creative nonfiction essays that follow, I will compare the revival of Webster's time with the revival of mine—a revival that I am now, in my current career, invested in perpetuating. Taking each of Webster's hallmarks in turn, I will, in the next chapter, discuss the age-old practice of quilting for hire, which has led to the advent of the longarm quilting machine and a widespread mechanization of quiltmaking. This mechanization figures heavily into a new aesthetic—and a new set of ethics for entering and judging quilt contests. In the third chapter, I will discuss the notion of intellectual property rights as they apply to quilts and quilt patterns, a notion often misunderstood among today's many cottage-industry pattern designers. I will also give a brief account of the first court case in the United States involving a quilter's rights to her designs. In the fourth chapter, I will discuss the evolution of quilt shows and high-stakes contests in the increasingly commercial climate of the quilt world. This will include a brief discussion of the pressure national organizations feel to produce two, three, or even four annual quilt events—a saturation the industry may not be equipped to support. Finally, in the fifth chapter, I will make predictions about the future of the quilting—among them the globalization of the quilting aesthetic—and recommendations about future research in this vast and diverse field.

Chapter 2

The Increasing Demand for Competent Quilters

The first bed-sized quilt top I ever made never got quilted. It was a simple rail fence pattern—six-inch blocks, each pieced from three strips of fabric, set together to make a giant basket-weave pattern. I had chosen three batik fabrics for this quilt in colors I loved and had purchased the batting, the extra fabric for the binding, and the several yards of material required for the backing all at the same time. I had every intent of finishing this quilt. Yet after the top was complete, I folded it up with the extra materials and packed it away in a closet.

I started my next project immediately. It was a small sampler quilt. Having mastered the straight lines and right angles of the rail fence pattern, I was ready to tackle triangles, and so I chose six or seven blocks from *The It's OK If You Sit on My Quilt Book* by Mary Ellen Hopkins—still, in my opinion, one of the best block books ever published for beginners. The blocks I chose were scaled to finish at several different sizes, and after they were done, I added strips to the sides of the smaller blocks to make them fit alongside the larger ones. It was a nice sampler project, though the chopped-off

points of the little triangles were evidence that I still had a lot to learn about careful cutting, pressing, and stitching.

This, too, was never quilted.

My third project did get quilted, though it was a heartbreaking disaster. I had pieced an attic windows quilt from three gorgeous, wintery blue fabrics. If the quiltmaker is careful with the placement of the different values—lights, mediums, and darks—in an attic windows quilt, her finished top looks three dimensional, like a grid of windowpanes with the light hitting the sills at different angles. The fabric I had chosen for the “windows” was printed with tiny, bare trees standing on a field of snow. My husband, who loves winter, was thrilled with my progress on this quilt and suggested that we hang it on a blank wall in our apartment once it was finished. Encouraged, I layered the completed top with the batting and the backing fabric—but I had no idea what to do next. How was I supposed to keep all those layers from slipping out of alignment while wrestling it under the arm of my little sewing machine? And what about turning corners? Was I supposed to stitch a couple of inches, stop, and then pivot the whole mess around the needle before stitching the next little bit? That would take forever!

I decided to skip the quilting and go straight to the binding. By binding the edges first, I reasoned, I could keep the three layers in place for the quilting part. Genius! Plus, I was getting very comfortable following along with the how-to-piece illustrations in my quiltmaking books. Preparing a simple double-fold binding looked easy. That I could do.

And so I bound my unquilted quilt. Big mistake.

Quiltmaking is not like woodworking. Yes, there is much measuring twice and cutting once to be done, but wood is static. Barring slight responses to excessive moisture or extreme temperature, a sheet of wood tends to hold its shape. Fabric, however, slips and slides and stretches and shifts—some more than others. This fabric company might print its cottons on greige goods (pronounced “gray” goods and referring to unbleached and unprocessed cloth) that are woven seventy warp threads by seventy weft threads to the inch, while that company works with a different manufacturer who produces eighty-by-sixty weaves. What happens when you piece patches of dissimilar weaves together? This patch stretches a little bit more than that one, that’s what, and those tiny one-thirty-second-of-an-inch distortions multiply across a bed-sized quilt top, leading to puckers and swells and trapezoid-shaped quilts. Batting is worse. Polyester, wool, cotton, silk, bamboo, soy, corn, and blends of every ratio imaginable—how does a beginner know what to buy? She looks at the price tag, usually, and brings home the cheapest, fluffiest, most synthetic, most flammable batting that will, to her great despair, poke through the backing fabric with every punch of the needle, prevent her quilt from ever draping nicely over a bed, and stop any air from circulating through the layers, ensuring no one will ever get a comfortable night’s sleep beneath it. But it’s batting. Who’s going to see it, right?

Quilt layers are difficult to control, and materials of low quality make them even less likely to behave. But even with the best materials, you baste first, then quilt, then square up the sides by trimming carefully, and finally bind. This is because the machine’s presser foot pushes the layers out in front of it as it chugs along, much like a shovel

pushes snow. The top stretches out most, which is why it's best to cut the backing and batting a couple of inches larger all around before you quilt.

Now, knowing this, imagine what happened to my attic windows quilt. As I quilted, I pushed a whole lot of slack up against that binding. Both the quilt top and the backing were riddled with tucks and pleats. It was a mess. Rather than pick out all those stitches, remove the binding, and do it right, I pitched the whole thing into the trash and promised myself I would do better next time.

Next time, however, I was still too leery of machine quilting to give it a try. My piecing skills were progressing nicely, but I had yet to successfully quilt anything I had made—and hand quilting was not even on my radar. Therefore, I tied my fourth project. Another mess. Still having learned nothing about batting, I chose the same nasty polyester fluff I had used before. Every time I pulled a length of yarn through the layers of the quilt, I pulled a little white tuft of the batting up with it—quite a problem, since this quilt was pieced from black and dark plum-colored fabrics.

After five attempts, I finally realized I was going to have to learn how to quilt if I was going to make quilts.

* * *

I can think of no craft other than quilting that requires proficiency in two totally different skill sets. It stands to reason that most needleworkers would prefer doing one thing over the other. The story of my own evolution as a quiltmaker is quite common and is the reason that so many of us have closets full of UFOs—unfinished objects. Besides that, piecing a quilt top is more exciting. Shopping for the fabrics,

choosing the colors, and picking the patchwork pattern, a quiltmaker is making decisions about how the finished project will look and, if she's like me, is already imagining what admiring onlookers will say. Deep down, she knows that those same admiring onlookers would have to view her work at close range to even notice, much less appreciate, the quilting stitches. Why bother?

This question, of course, assumes that quiltmakers are more concerned with receiving accolades than with basking in the personal satisfaction that comes from a job well done—and that is an assumption I am more than willing to make. What quiltmaker forgives her own poor color and design choices by taking comfort in her impeccable stitching? More often, it is the other way around. A crooked seam or mismatched point easily disappears in a whole that is visually stunning.

The decorative arts are, after all, *arts*, and as such are subject to the critical, evaluative eye of the viewer. Quiltmakers have always known this. Yet the American quilt is seated in the public imagination as a utilitarian object that is made by rough hands in an unforgiving environment and is, at best, accidentally beautiful. It's a romantic notion that early writers both perpetuate and dispel. In one breath, Rose Kretsinger says, "The practicability and usefulness of quilted things and the joy and pride derived from creating things for everyday use, should be an incentive to every domestic housewife to make and own at least one good quilt" (Hall and Kretsinger 259). Yet in the next, she says, "The love of beautiful things and self-expression seemed entirely regardless of all difficulty, and since the pioneer woman could not live in luxury, she made a desperate effort, at least, not to live in ugliness" (Hall and Kretsinger 260-61).

Kretsinger seems to purport that it is acceptable for the quiltmaker to feel pride in the functional aspect of her work, but any attempt at beauty could not raise the quilt above its mythic station as a lowly object—the quiltmaker's endeavor to be artistic is described not as a noble pursuit, but rather as a desperate avoidance of ugliness.

Even the quote my mother stenciled on her sewing room wall further illustrates that it was uncouth for a quiltmaker to admit that she was trying to make something pretty. The quote demonstrates that aesthetic value is secondary to utility, and only because this woman's heart was so close to breaking was she justified in striving for beauty.

Still, although quiltmakers of the past were not allowed to admit it, aesthetic value was key. Every quiltmaker, no matter how modest, wants her work to be evaluated as an object of beauty—even if she has to hire someone else to do half the work.

According to Barbara Brackman, "Professional quilters predate patchwork in England and America" (*Clues* 16). Brackman found records of the expenses Pennsylvanians Elizabeth and Sarah Coates paid for quilting in 1721. Furthermore, quilters advertised their services. Brackman writes, "In 1749 Anne Griffith of Annapolis said she did 'plain or figured, coarse or fine quilting in the best and cheapest manner in her house'" (*Clues* 16).

Even in 1935, Carrie Hall advised her readers, "When you have finished your top turn it over to an experienced quilter, for a beautiful quilt may be made or marred by

the quilting" (46). But later in the same book, Rose Kretsinger, Hall's collaborator, practically condescends to those patchworkers who hire quilters:

Few women have had the inclination, courage, or skill to make a really good quilt, from start to finish,...it would seem that after months in the work of producing a design of patch or lovely appliqué, it would be a temptation to complete the entire piece of work, by also doing the quilting. Instead, the quilt top is made by one person, then passed on to some other worker to be quilted. (263)

Kretsinger does go on to concede that not every needleworker had the space to leave a quilting frame set up for as long as was necessary to complete a quilt. The three layers of a quilt—the backing, batting, and top—must be stretched out as flat and as square as possible on a frame, or else the quilting stitches will draw up puckers and swells. At the time, the quilts were made quite large—up to 10 feet square—so that they would hang down off the sides of the bed and nearly touch the floor. Kretsinger also granted that sore fingers and "other discomforts of the work" would discourage both "the average modern woman" from excelling at quilting and the for-hire quilter from staying in business for long: "Seldom have our modern women time or nervous energy to stay by the quilting frame long enough to complete a piece of work of this kind even though highly paid for executing the work" (265-66).

The space needed to quilt has always been prohibitive. It was common for pioneer women to suspend their quilt frames from the ceilings of their homes so that they could be raised up out of the way when the day's stitching was done. It's possible that the traditional quilting bee—romanticized in American art and literature as a well-attended social event during which a community's women would gather to finish all the tops they had made in previous months and during which its young men would court its

young ladies—rose out of a basic need for space to quilt. Such bees were often held outdoors or were hosted by the lady of the largest house. They started at dawn and lasted until well after dark, for even those with the space for a frame had to put it away before the next day's tasks needed doing.

Although the quilting bee was a solution to the problem of space, and although it satisfied the social needs of poor and wealthy communities alike, other more ceremonious reasons for having them evolved. For example, Hall quotes Mrs. E. E. Hardesty, a woman born around 1840, as saying:

When I was a girl we did not quilt any of the 'tops' we had made until we were ready to be married. A girl announced her engagement by having a 'quilting bee' just like you have an announcement party today....It was at the 'quilting bee'...that I announced my engagement." (37)

* * *

Today's quiltmakers are sheepish about the number of unquilted tops they have stashed away in their closets, but really, this is nothing new. Dealers offer an abundance of antique tops, which quilt history enthusiasts enjoy finishing with period-appropriate quilting designs. However, over time, quiltmakers' reasons for leaving their tops unquilted have changed. While the early needleworker, who both pieced and quilted mostly by hand, lacked space for a quilt frame, she still knew how to quilt. After all, her participation in the quilting bee was expected. In contrast, most quiltmakers today piece by machine and are intimidated by machine quilting. They are terrified by the prospect of ruining their tops with their novice machine-quilting skills and would rather spend their time piecing more bed-sized tops than practicing machine quilting on smaller projects.

The availability of the home sewing machine has shifted the craft of quilting considerably and has widened the rift between the proficient piecer and the proficient quilter. Quilters want to distinguish themselves from piecers and often refer to those who don't quilt as "toppers," a term that has become almost derogatory or belittling. Those who have mastered machine quilting are assured income in the quilt industry, if they want it. They either quilt for hire or teach the timid how to quilt for themselves. Strangely enough, herein lies another rift. Those who teach do so because they, like Kretsinger, want to encourage quiltmakers *not* to hire a quilter, but to finish their work by themselves.

When a quiltmaker today decides to tackle machine quilting, she must choose from two options. Should she learn to quilt on her regular home sewing machine (also known as a shortarm machine because the arm that extends over the bed of the machine leaves only a few inches of space between the needle and the machine's motor)—the same machine she uses to piece her tops? Teachers like Harriet Hargrave attract students by promising to show them all the tips and tricks they need to make quilting on a shortarm machine easy. Harriet disparages the machine industry for making would-be quilters believe they must spend tens of thousands of dollars on longarm machines to achieve even acceptable results, and she strives to spread the message that this is simply not true. In fact, one of Harriet's first students, Diane Gaudynski, has perfected shortarm machine quilting and has, over the last 20 years, become one of today's most acclaimed machine quilters.

Quilting on a shortarm machine is akin to drawing by moving a piece of paper under the point of a pencil held in a fixed position. Quilting on a longarm machine, however, involves standing up and driving the machine over a quilt stretched on a large frame. Quiltmakers who wish to become proficient in longarm quilting must dedicate additional time and resources to their education than those who choose to learn shortarm quilting. First of all, the longarmer must have a room in her home that she can dedicate to housing the machine—there is no suspending a longarm machine and its mammoth frame from the ceiling! Second, while the shortarm student can easily transport her machine to and from classes at her local quilt shop, the longarm student must travel. Many of the most sought after longarm teachers are endorsed by one of the four or five major longarm manufacturers in the United States. Some even own dealerships. These teachers offer classes at the national quilt shows their respective companies sponsor, at education centers located at the companies' corporate offices, or at dealer showrooms.

Some who dedicate themselves to longarming do so because they simply want to finish their own tops. But many who don't aspire to make showpieces, earn an endorsement, or become a highly paid teacher plan to launch a home quilting business—to become the "some other worker" Kretsinger described.

Of course, not all quiltmakers want to pay for machine work. There are still individuals and groups who hand quilt for hire, but most do so for love of the work, not for any significant income. The Bloomingdale Willing Hands Society, founded in Shickshinny, Pennsylvania, in 1908, is a small group of women who still charge seventy-

five cents per spool for hand quilting. The wait to have a top quilted by this group can be up to two years. According to Webster, this price would have been considered inexpensive, even in 1915. She wrote that quilters then were paid by the amount of thread they used, not by the time they spent on the work, and she listed the average two-hundred-yard spool of cotton thread "such as is found in every dry-goods store" as the universal measure:

When many of the old quilts, now treasured as remembrances of our diligent and ambitious ancestors, were made, one dollar per spool was the usual price paid for quilting. However, as the number of quilters has decreased, the price of quilting has increased, until as much as five dollars per spool is now asked in some parts of the country. (107-09)

Today, Amish and Mennonite quilters have become the legendary American heroes of hand quilting. Richard and Georgina Fries own Bellwether Dry Goods in Lothian, Maryland, and on their website, they list expert hand-quilting and finishing services by "one of over 100 Amish and Mennonite women from across the country." One of their selling points is this: "No group quilting. Your quilt will be completed by one woman with wonderful, even stitching." Rather than charging by the spool, the Bellwether quilters charge by the yard of thread used—from \$1.00 to \$1.50 per running yard, depending on the quilter. Sounds reasonable. But multiplied by Webster's universal measure, the average price of \$1.25 per yard represents a staggering 9,900 percent rate of inflation per two-hundred-yard spool. Still, a quilt that requires four such spools to complete, at an estimated ten minutes per running yard, brings the quilter a gross hourly wage of \$8.96—quite meager by today's standards.

There are those quiltmakers who are happy to pay \$1,500 just to say they had their tops quilted by an Amish needleworker. But two notable controversies have arisen in recent years to tarnish the gleam of Amish quilting. First, Nao Nomura of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Janneken Smucker of the University of Delaware published "From Fibers to Fieldwork: A Multifaceted Approach to Re-examining Amish Quilts" in the 2006 edition of *Uncoverings*, the annual journal of the American Quilt Study Group. The authors proved through fiber-testing technologies that "antique" Amish quilts netting top dollar and considered *objects d'art* in museum collections were actually made during the last half of the twentieth century. Second, Kathleen Parrish's article "The Global Business of Amish Quilts," published in the November 2006 issue of *Quilters Newsletter*, casts the quilt trade in Pennsylvania's Lancaster County in a suspicious light. Parrish writes that many of the handmade quilts sold in the area are actually made by Hmong needleworkers. The Hmong people, known for their intricate appliqué work, fled from Laos to Thailand during the Vietnam War, after which nearly 280,000 immigrated to the United States. Some found their way to Lancaster County, where they received not only aid from the Mennonite Central Committee, but also the respect and admiration of their Amish and Mennonite neighbors for their talents with the needle. Parrish notes:

Nearly all of the appliqué on Lancaster-style quilts made domestically is done by Hmong women from their homes here. The quilting is then farmed out to Amish and Mennonite women before the finished pieces end up in tourist shops where they are advertised as being locally made. The collaboration, however, isn't publicized for fear that visitors to area businesses would be less inclined to purchase a quilt that isn't made exclusively by Amish or Mennonite hands. If labeled, the quilts often

credit Lancaster's Plain People but rarely list the Hmong who, if they are mentioned, are referred to as "local Lancaster quilters." (38-39)

I would venture to guess that most quiltmakers looking to hire a quilter are less concerned with these revelations than they are with simply getting their quilts finished quickly and beautifully—and cheaply. For this reason, I believe machine quilting for hire—longarm quilting in particular—is here to stay. Further supporting this belief is the fact that longarm business owners have begun to offer classes for patchworkers in an effort to get their clients to piece better tops. Well-made tops, with their straight seams and perfectly matched points, are easier to quilt. The overt message behind the offering of these classes is *if you do your best work, then I can do mine*. But behind the scenes, longarmers are often frustrated with novice piecers, referring to poorly made tops as wastes of fabric. The fact of the matter is that longarmers for hire don't always have the most beautiful canvases on which to stitch. This, too, is another frustration that is as old as quilting for hire. According to Webster:

Sometimes the pieced top is of such common material as to seem an unworthy basis for the beautiful work of an experienced quilter, who stitches with such patient hand, wasting, some may think, her art upon too poor a subject. However, for the consolation of those who consider quilting a wicked waste of time, it may be added that nowadays expert quilters are very few indeed, and enthusiasts who have spent weeks piecing a beautiful quilt have been known to wait a year before being able to get it quilted by an expert in this art. (103-06)

* * *

The debate about how quilts that were "quilted by check" should be categorized when they are entered into shows and judged when they are entered into contests has flared more so in the last five years than during the preceding century. Why? Because

the rather recent computerization of home sewing machines and longarm machines, along with other new technologies available to quilters, have everyone in the industry suddenly considering fairness. Should a quilt made by one person entirely by hand be judged in the same category with a quilt made by two people—a piecer and the quilter she hired? Furthermore, how does that comparison change if the quilter quilted by hand, by hand-guided machine, or by computerized machine? For decades, only one name appeared on the label next to a quilt hanging in a show, and that was the name of the piecer. It was impossible to tell, and perhaps considered unimportant, whether the person bearing that name worked alone or hired a quilter. The quilter for hire was anonymous; once she had been paid, her part was over, and she had no claim to any ribbons, awards, or cash prizes the quilt may have earned.

To answer the call for equity, national quilt show organizers have begun to dissect and subdivide contest categories. Best hand workmanship is now judged separately from best machine workmanship, best single-maker quilt from best two-person or group quilt, best traditional bed quilt from best artistic wall quilt. In fact, entrants to the 2009 International Quilt Festival, one of the largest and most well-attended annual quilt shows in the United States, had to slot their work into one of twenty-one contest categories!

In 2007, Charlotte Warr Andersen, president of the International Quilt Association, which produces the festival, rocked the quilt-for-hire community with the following statement: “The IQA judged show is a test of the art and craftsmanship of the quiltmakers, not their ability to hire the most proficient professional to do it for them.”

No longer would works for hire be eligible for the contest. It was a bold move, but one that clearly communicated that provenance was just as important as workmanship and that full disclosure of the circumstances of how a quilt was made—that is, whether money changed hands—was expected. Since then, several other major national shows have followed suit, adding similar stipulations to their entry materials.

While many in the quilt world felt this was a step in the right direction, professional longarmers felt shut out. Even though Andersen's statement went on to explain that longarmers were only technically barred from the handmade and hand-quilting categories—so obvious it probably didn't need to be said—the message to quilters for hire was clear.

* * *

Getting beyond the *who* of judged quiltmaking, well-known teacher, author, and judge Anita Shackelford, accomplished in both hand and machine quilting, tackled the *how*. She wrote an article called "One Judge's Look at Computerized Quilting" for the January/February 2007 issue of *Quilters Newsletter*. In it, she squared off with those calling for yet another fork in the hierarchy of contest judging—this one between hand-guided machine quilting and computer-guided longarm quilting. The latter allows the quilter to load a quilting motif into a computer attached to the longarm machine. She can then digitally rotate and resize the motif as desired or place it in a repeat and hit a button. The machine gets the quilting done while the quilter heads out for coffee and a crossword puzzle.

At least that's the popular impression held by opponents of computerized machine quilting.

Shackelford, however, invites such skeptics to step up to her high-end computerized longarm and quilt something. "Of course they say that they don't know how," she writes. "So why would anyone think that using a machine of any kind will guarantee perfect results?" She concludes by listing the things that judges look for, or should be looking for, when they're evaluating a quilt, things that don't change based on the method of the quilting: balanced tension, clean starts and stops, good design, no distortion of the layers, straight lines, and smooth curves. "I believe quiltmakers and quilt show organizers need to accept computerized quilting just as they have accepted other forms of quilting," says Shackelford. "Judges need to do their jobs, looking beyond *how* a quilt was made and focusing on *how well*."

Quilters Newsletter printed two readers' responses to Shackelford's article in its April 2008 issue. One of the respondents, Barbara Massengill, wrote, "Which skills are being judged: the computer skills or the sewing skills?...Home sewing machines and longarm machines still require the quilter's skills. Computerized machines cross the line." It is interesting that the concern of the other respondent, Frances B. Calhoun, has already, in less than two years, become a nonissue—at least at the national level. She advocated that all persons involved in the making of a quilt be listed on the label and that quilted-for-hire works not be judged in the same category as single-maker quilts.

* * *

Shows' new standards have already shifted the relationship between quiltmakers and their for-hire quilters. How many professional quilters are willing to quilt a would-be contest entrant's top for free, or on the speculation that any prize money the quilt may earn would be shared? How many of those entrants offer to pay the longarmer *after* the show? And how many lie on their entry form and pay their longarmer anyway, or find other ways to compensate her for her services?

As long as people are making quilts, there will be quilters for hire. I don't believe that will ever change. However, the industry has much work to do in the coming years to ensure equity and honesty, if at all possible, especially as the cash prizes at national quilt shows climb past the current \$10,000 best-of-show award offered annually at International Quilt Festival.

Chapter 3

The Desire for New Quilt Patterns

One of my first assignments as a brand new editor at *Quilters Newsletter* was to plan and write a five-part series of “Easy Lessons”—quick, two-page instructional articles—about how different stabilizers could be used in quilting. Stabilizers are typically used in garment making, but because we were trying to make a particular advertiser happy, I was tasked with devising ways quiltmakers could use them, too.

I came up with a way to use tear-away stabilizers for quilting and foundation piecing (a method of sewing fabric patches directly onto a paper pattern and later tearing the paper away), heat-away stabilizers for decorative stitching, sticky-backed stabilizers for mitering borders, and water-soluble stabilizers for dimensional embellishments. For the cut-away stabilizer, I came up with an appliqué method I thought was pretty good.

Appliqué involves cutting out shapes from one fabric and stitching them to another fabric. Traditionally, quiltmakers basted their appliqué patches to the background, then used the tips of their needles to turn under the raw edges before

every single stitch they took. Aptly called needle-turn appliqué, this method is enjoyable for those who enjoy hand work, but tedious and eye straining for those who don't.

One of the most common methods of machine appliqué involves tracing all the appliqué patches onto freezer paper, cutting them out, pressing their waxy sides to the wrong sides of the appropriate fabrics, and then cutting out every shape, leaving a 3/16-inch turn-under allowance "by eye." The quiltermaker then dabs a water-soluble glue stick onto the allowances and, little by little, pinches the raw edges to affix them to the backside of the freezer paper. She positions each patch on the background fabric and machine stitches around it with a narrow zigzag stitch. Then she trims away the fabric behind the patch, spritzes her work with water to loosen the glue, and removes the freezer paper.

It's wet, sticky work, and tedious to boot.

My solution was to prepare each appliqué patch by backing it with the cut-away stabilizer, stitching through both layers around the perimeter of the shape, then slitting the stabilizer and turning the shape right-side out. Press the appliqué patch, and it can be stitched to the background fabric in much the same way as appliqué patches prepared with freezer paper and glue.

To demonstrate, I drafted a simple flower with five round petals—a very traditional shape that can be found on any number of nineteenth-century appliquéd quilts—and showed step by step how these flowers could be prepared and stitched to a quilt in this way. The article went to press.

Shortly after that issue hit newsstands, our editorial assistant received a very angry and accusatory letter from a reader who was shocked that *Quilters Newsletter*, her longtime favorite quilting magazine, would plagiarize so blatantly. The five-petal flower, she claimed, was her design. She had appliquéd that very shape onto a quilt she had sent us years before in hopes that we would consider publishing the pattern for it. If we liked that shape so much, why had we rejected her submission? Not only that, but the full-page advertisement inside that same issue's front cover featured an appliquéd quilt with shapes that, according to her, came directly out of her daughter's sketch book. Curious, we looked closely at the ad. The quilt pictured there was another traditional appliquéd pattern, with flowers and fruits spilling out of a basket—all very reminiscent of mid-nineteenth-century Baltimore album quilts. She explained that she and her daughter, also a quilter, had just launched a pattern company and that they were taken aback by the sudden widespread illegal use of their designs. They had, in fact, written to the advertiser several times, requesting that the company cease and desist from using that quilt in their advertisements, or else they would have no choice but to take them to court for copyright infringement. Furthermore, they threatened to come after us if we continued to run their advertisements in our magazine. Strangely enough, there was no explanation of how the company in question had gained access to the daughter's sketch books.

The reader concluded her letter by accusing *Quilters Newsletter* of making up my name, allegedly to cover up our dastardly deed: "Who has a crazy name like Angie Hodapp? How do you people think up these things?"

Later on, it became part of my job to evaluate article submissions for *Quilters Newsletter*. One day, I came across a submission that seemed rather promising. The woman's cover letter explained that she was currently involved in a copyright battle and that her article would serve as a cautionary tale for all our readers who might be interested in designing quilt patterns for profit. Intrigued, I turned the cover letter over and began to read.

This woman's article was terrifying—but not in the way she had intended it to be. According to her account, she began to see her original quilt designs published in several different “magazines, trade journals, and catalogs.” She suspected her colleagues of stealing her designs when she brought her quilts to work to show them off, even going so far as to wonder whether she was being videotaped while she sketched quilts designs in her checkstand. Or perhaps, she speculated, her quilts were being photographed upstairs in the break room while she was downstairs working. She writes:

I blamed myself for being gullible for being manipulated by their false interest. I stopped bringing my quilts into share and eventually stopped talking about them. I thought this strategy would stop the theft, but I was wrong....I checked the lock on my door. There was no sign of forced entry and no scratches around the keyhole so I am guessing the thief used a key or a lock picking device. I went to the police and filed a report. I changed the locks—many times. Over the years, the thief had been coming into my home, taking out what he wanted to copy and then bringing it back and putting it away so I wouldn't notice....The police and I eventually stopped the creep from coming in my home but the sale of the stolen sketches still continues....Based on the distances between the addresses of the people who are using my designs, I determined that the common link between them is the Internet.

At this point during my initial reading, I wondered if the submission had been intended as satire, and I began to laugh out loud. This woman obviously had some insight into the world of magazine publishing and had taken the time to write something funny that would give the *Quilters Newsletter* staff a lighthearted break in our daily routines. But when I continued reading, I realized this was not the case:

In addition to being burglarized, I am also a victim of identity theft. I work very hard to create original designs. I want to create something that no one has ever seen before. I believe in honesty and fair play. If what I sketch even remotely resembles another person's work, I'll scrap the design for something else. My art is part of me. I am putting my soul out there so when you buy my stolen designs, you are stealing my identity. Even if you buy the artwork in good faith, you are being made an accessory to a crime.

This woman was crying out against an injustice that, in her mind, was very real and that went beyond a simple economic breach to a violation not only of her very identity, but also of her soul.

A third incident that demonstrated to me how quilt designers often misunderstand the notion of intellectual property occurred as we were lining up projects for our annual newsstand-only magazine *Quilt It for Christmas*. For several years running, Dilys Fronks, a popular quilt designer from the United Kingdom, worked up one of her signature silhouette quilts especially for this issue. Dilys had written a book in 2002 called *Enchanted Views: Quilts Inspired by Wrought Iron Designs* (C&T Publishing). Each project inside was made by first piecing together a colorful background of batiks or hand-dyed fabrics; an intricate design was then cut out of a single piece of black fabric, laid over the background, and appliquéd in place. The effect was quite unique and inspired a lot of quilters to make their own versions of Dilys's quilts. I know

this for certain, because while I was working at Harriet's Treadle Arts, Harriet hosted a trunk show of the quilts featured in that book. We not only sold out of the books, but we were also cleaned out of black fabric. Dilys was certainly not the first designer to publish silhouette patterns, but her style, like that of most other artists, was inimitable, so it was easy to identify the source of a quilt made from one of her patterns. Our regular readers had come to anticipate Dilys's exclusive Christmas pattern with much excitement.

As Vivian, the senior editor in charge of that issue, sifted through the rest of the Christmas projects that had been submitted for her consideration, she was interested to find a silhouette quilt made by a woman in Canada. The woman wrote that she was launching her own pattern company—a familiar story—and that she planned to specialize in original silhouette designs. She had seen Dilys's patterns in *Quilt It for Christmas* in years past and thought our readers might like to have her design, too.

The problem was that, with the exception of a few angles and curves, her design was identical to one we knew had been designed by Dilys some time before. Vivian presented the two designs side-by-side to us other editors, and we all agreed that this could not have been an accident. Then Vivian presented the similarity to the woman and asked about her inspiration for the design. The woman blew past defensive and went straight-line to aggressive. She was a Christian woman, she proclaimed, who knew the difference between right and wrong; she would go ahead with her pattern company and with God's help would be more successful than that Dilys Fronks woman could ever be.

* * *

It is as easy to write these women off as eccentrics as it is difficult to avoid feeling disconcerted by their outrageous claims. These incidents, however, although extreme, illustrate perfectly the fierce sense of ownership most quilt designers—including those who have more legitimate claims—feel for their work. The demand for new quilt patterns is higher today than it was a century ago, when Marie Webster counted it among the three telltale hallmarks of a quilt revival, and that demand has entrepreneurs scrambling to compete for the \$2.89 billion spent annually by today's dedicated quiltmakers (NFO Research, Inc. and DP Research Solutions 5). The fact that at least one quilter equates the theft of what she believes are her original designs with the theft of her very identity demonstrates how indivisible the connection between art and self can be. Quilters take their rights to their designs very seriously and the breach of those rights quite personally. As a novice editor, I realized I had no idea what those rights were.

In discussing this with the other editors, I found out that we at *Quilters Newsletter* generally operated according to the information in a three-part series of articles we had published back in 1998. The author of the series, Janet Jo Smith, had not only been one of our editors at the time, but she had also been a licensed attorney. Her articles had swept across the quilting community and had become accepted as the last word on the subject. According to Smith, the copyrights to a quilt design were to be established in much the same manner as the copyrights to literary works and visual art.

Smith writes that a copyright exists from the time an original design is fixed in tangible form—that is, once it is made into a quilt. However, a sketch or drawing of a quilt design, if original in concept, is also intellectual property rendered in tangible form, and a quilt made from such a drawing is considered a derivative work. Although it is not necessary to register a quilt with the United States Copyright Office in order to create a copyright, no legal action can be taken until the quilt in question has been registered, and the copyright holder—the maker of the original quilt—has a better chance of not only winning her case, but also recouping her legal expenses, if she has registered her quilt within three months of its completion.

Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that teachers of quilting have given their students permission to reproduce quilts presented as class samples, if those samples were the original works of the teacher; however, the teacher retains the copyright, and any student who attempts to sell, publicly display, or profit from the design—including the writing and selling of a pattern for the quilt and the acceptance of prize money—without the teacher's permission has violated the teacher's copyright. The same is true for teachers as for those who publish books or offer patterns for their original designs. So long as a quiltmaker has purchased the book or pattern, she is free to reproduce the quilts therein, so long as she does not do so for profit.

"The general rule is that you cannot copy the original work of another in any medium without her consent," Smith writes, listing drawings, paintings, and photographs among the violating media. "Within the copyright statutes are exemptions called 'Fair Use.' Within these narrowly interpreted exceptions, copies of protected

materials may be made for teaching, scholarly research, news reporting, and commentary or criticism by the media.” Smith is careful to note that “teaching” refers to primary and secondary schools and universities, not to classes or demonstrations offered at quilt guild meetings, quilt stores, or quilt events. “The reasoning,” she explains, “is that the law is meant to protect the commercial value of [the quiltmaker’s] work, balanced against the importance of public education.” There are three tests of Fair Use, according to Smith: whether the copy is the same size as the original work, whether the artist (copyright holder) was given credit for her work, and whether the copy adversely affects the artist’s potential to profit from the original work.

While Smith’s articles offered a rather clinical breakdown of the legal issues facing today’s quiltmakers, they did not address the more emotional side of intellectual property, the side that came through so clearly in the bizarre and accusatory letters the magazine received. Mark Rose, author of *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright*, calls copyright “not a transcendent moral idea, but a specifically modern formation produced by...the classical liberal culture of possessive individualism” (142). While he does acknowledge that copyright is a function of economics—an almost obvious concession, as the very purpose of copyright law is to assign a compensatory penalty to those who stand between an artist and her money—Rose drills deeper, and on the same page, he writes, “Copyright is deeply rooted in our conception of ourselves as individuals.”

Martha Woodmansee and Peter Jaszi, editors of *The Construction of Authorship: Textual Appropriation in Law and Literature*, agree, purporting that modern copyright

law is incompatible with the human initiative to create collective, corporate, or collaborative works—a noteworthy discord, as the making of quilts is, historically speaking, a fundamentally communal activity, and the provenance of many traditional patterns nearly impossible to prove. Furthermore, they demarcate those things that are eligible for copyright from those things that are not:

To merit copyright an “expression” must be “fixed,” leading to the exclusion of a wide range of improvised works and works of oral tradition. Moreover, since copyright extends only to “original” works, it denies protection to folklore and items of cultural heritage that are valued chiefly for their fidelity to tradition rather than their deviations from it. (11)

We can almost imagine that this passage was written with quilts in mind, as it almost directly speaks to the question of whether or not quilters—makers of “items of cultural heritage”—are eligible for copyright protection. Indeed, it claims they are not.

* * *

The publication of Smith’s articles was well-timed, as the eyes of the quiltmaking community were trained on a groundbreaking court case that, in 1998, was about to enter litigation. The case was rooted in the 1995 star-studded movie *How to Make an American Quilt*, based on Whitney Otto’s 1991 novel of the same name, and marked the first time a quiltmaker’s rights to her designs would be called into question in an American court room.

When Universal City Studios and Amblin Entertainment began production in 1994, they knew they would need two signature quilts for their film. The first was, of course, the movie’s centerpiece—a wedding quilt the older characters make for the story’s young protagonist. As the women work on this quilt, each remembers her own

youth so that the quilt itself, when completed, becomes an emblem of feminine strength and endurance in the face of multifaceted hardships. One woman in particular, played by Maya Angelou, remembers in a flashback a quilt made by her grandmother, who had been a slave. This would be the second quilt showcased in the film. It needed to be in the style of mid-nineteenth-century African American story quilts, and the producers would need two identical versions of it—one to look new and the other to look aged and weathered.

Universal Studios hired quiltmaker Patricia McCormick as a technical consultant, and McCormick, in turn, hired quiltmaker Barbara Brown to design the story quilt. Brown designed patterns for this quilt's fifteen blocks and walked away with \$750 and a written agreement that she would retain the copyrights to these patterns, even though Universal would own the quilts made from these patterns.

To design the wedding quilt, called "Where Love Resides," McCormick worked with Universal's production team and came up with sixteen appliqué blocks. One of the blocks designed by McCormick, however, was a little too similar to one of the blocks Brown had designed for the story quilt. This is the block that led Brown to file twenty-five counts of alleged copyright infringement on November 1, 1996. On October 8, 1998, the court granted only sixteen of the original counts, and in April 1999, a settlement conference between plaintiff and defendants failed to bring either side satisfaction. The United States District Court for the District of Maryland heard opening arguments in civil case number L-96-3450, Barbara Brown v. Patricia A. McCormick, et al, on May 24, 1999.

How could one little quilt block initiate sixteen counts of copyright infringement? If the court recognized that McCormick's design was a derivative work based on Brown's original design, then every public display of "Where Love Resides" would be considered a single infringement. McCormick launched a publicity tour in conjunction with the release of the movie, and she displayed both quilts at several national venues, most notably at the 1995 International Quilt Festival in Houston, Texas. It was there that promotional t-shirts and tote bags bearing the image of "Where Love Resides" were sold, which also served to implicate a merchandising firm employed by Universal Studios in the lawsuit. In addition, McCormick wrote *Patty McCormick's Pieces of an American Quilt: Quilts, Patterns, Photos & Behind the Scenes Stories from the Movie* (C&T Publishing, 1996), and to publicize her book, she appeared with the quilts on episodes of *Handmade by Design* and *Simply Quilts*, two cable television programs.

The court ruled in Brown's favor, but declared that the defendants' actions did not constitute willful infringement. Therefore, Brown was awarded actual and statutory damages only—\$52.35 in actual damages and \$14,000 statutory damages. Although some were disappointed by the ruling, especially by the meager sum of "actual damages" awarded to a quiltmaker for the unlawful use of her original design, the case set a new tone in the quilt world. Quilts, like all other fine arts, were to be respected for their originality, and more diligent quiltmakers—and publishers—learned to ask the right questions of the right people and to document all permissions granted before moving ahead with potentially profitable endeavors.

* * *

Beyond the basic definition of copyright and the exemptions protected under Fair Use, Smith addressed in her articles two concerns of more particular interest to quiltmakers. The first is the making of derivative works, and the second is the notion of public domain.

“Derivative works are quilts that share a similar element or theme,” writes Smith. “Only [the copyright holder] can make derivatives of her designs.” That’s fairly straightforward, but derivative works make up a sizable percentage of the quilts a viewer might see on display at any local or national quilt show. This is because many of today’s notable quilt teachers make their living offering classes rooted in derivation. Based on the “take my idea, but make it your own” platform, such classes allow the students to walk away with a greater sense of accomplishment because they believe that they have made something completely unique, even if a quilt judge, magazine editor, or other industry professional can take one look at the quilt and know immediately who the maker’s teacher was and in which workshop the quilt was begun.

Ricky Tims is a teacher of derivational classes, which he bases on series of his own original quilts. Rather than teaching his students how to create a particular quilt step by step—a popular format for a lot of quilt classes—he teaches his techniques and his creative approach, and he lets the students go from there. Derivations of his Rhapsody quilts and his Harmonic Convergence quilts are easy to spot. Another such teacher is Libby Lehman, who introduced her “sheer ribbon illusion” technique in her 1997 book *Threadplay* (That Patchwork Place). Lehman’s sheer ribbon quilts are characterized by long, winding ribbons that have been “thread painted”—embroidered

by machine—onto the surface of a pieced quilt with metallic thread. At the time of this writing, Lehman still lists this workshop on her website as one she is available to teach. Laura Wasilowski is yet another teacher who offers technique-based, rather than project-based, classes. Her free-form, whimsical approach to making appliquéd art quilts with fusible web (heat-activated sheets of glue) and bright, hand-dyed fabrics results in an easy-to-copy method that yields easy-to-recognize quilts.

“Variations are the most difficult issue in the area of copyright,” Smith writes. “Whether changes are great enough to produce an original quilt, not infringing on another artist’s design, is a question of fact to be decided case by case.” The test of this determination is to ask whether someone else looking at the quilt in question would think it had been made by the original quiltmaker. At best, this is a rather vague principle for designers who wish to capitalize on current trends in the quilt pattern marketplace—or even for those who seek to keep traditional quilt patterns alive by reproducing and publishing patterns for antique quilts.

The craft of quiltmaking is much older than the fierce defense of intellectual property ownership as it relates to quilt designs or patterns. Smith explains that copyrights to quilts made before 1978 have a maximum life of fifty-six years—an initial twenty-eight-year period plus a possible twenty-eight-year extension, should the copyright holder care to file for it (“Copyright for Quilters”). After this time, the quilt becomes part of the public domain and may be freely used by anyone. Quilts made after 1978 are protected by copyrights effective for the duration of the life of the artist or author plus fifty years. By this standard, a quiltmaker may assume that she may produce

an identical copy of a quilt made before 1926—and may profit from it—without violating the original maker's rights.

However, quilt copyright is more complicated than such simple math. This is because prior to 1978, the initial period of copyright began the moment the intellectual property was first published, or brought out into the public. In the quilt world, this is congruent with the public display of a quilt. So an original quilt made in 1890, but kept in a bureau or attic until the maker's granddaughter offers it for display, for the first time, in her state fair's needlework exhibition in, say, 1960, could still, in 2010, possibly be protected by copyright law.

This is especially important to the many quilt reproduction enthusiasts in the United States who have devoted themselves to copying antique quilts so that our quilting heritage will live on. Why? Because such enthusiasts—Harriet Hargrave among them—look in books or exhibition catalogs for photos of antique quilts to reproduce. For whose permission is the reproductionist obliged to ask, if the maker is dead and her quilt is now assumed to be part of the public domain? Is the owner of the antique quilt also the owner of the copyright, simply by virtue of the fact that he or she was the highest bidder at the auction house? Is the photographer the copyright owner? The book or catalog publisher? None of the above. The owner of an antique quilt has no rights to the design, much like the owner of a rare book or manuscript has no rights to the text—unless, of course, the author legally bequeathed those rights to that owner. Furthermore, the photographer has rights not to the object he photographed, but only to the photograph itself—rights he probably licensed to the publisher.

It's not as easy to apply copyright law as it pertains to the written word to a quilt. The trouble is that the plagiarism of written works, or works of fine art for that matter, is much easier to prove than the "plagiarism" of a quilt design. This is because quilting is a traditional craft rooted in the open sharing of quilt patterns. According to Webster, the beautiful old quilts of our ancestors "are worthy of study and imitation, and are deserving of careful preservation for the inspiration of future generations of quilters" (xxiv). Webster encourages the reproduction of antique quilts, yet she herself was among the first to earn income by designing original quilt patterns, having done so for *The Ladies' Home Journal* beginning in 1910. While this might seem like a double standard, nowhere in her book does Webster protest or even mention the widespread plagiarism of quilt designs well documented by historian Barbara Brackman in her *Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns*. In this weighty volume, Brackman presents more than four thousand quilt blocks and lists the publications that printed patterns for each as well as the many different names each was given by the various sources.

Brackman also chronicles the story of quilt patterns in her 1989 book *Clues in the Calico: A Guide to Identifying and Dating Antique Quilts*. The first quilt pattern published in the United States, she tells us, appeared in *Godey's Lady's Book* in January 1835 (18). It was a hexagon pattern, which seems anachronistic beside other quilt patterns of this century—it would resurface nearly one hundred years later under the name Grandmother's Flower Garden, Mosaic, or Honeycomb.

Mid-nineteenth-century quiltmakers, however, were not in the habit of turning to their periodicals for quilt patterns; they traded patterns freely among themselves,

tracing designs from each other's quilts during quilting bees and other social events. According to Carrie Hall, pioneer women "were delighted with the opportunity...to exchange quilt patterns" (14). Delighted as they were, according to Hall, they also respected certain boundaries. A wedding quilt, for instance, was not to be copied. She explains, "The prospective bridegroom drew a design or pattern of the bride-to-be's favorite flower....Every stitch was set by the bride and the result was much admired, but no one asked to copy it, as it was understood that the pattern was to be destroyed after this one quilt was finished" (34-35).

The printed pattern did not become a regular feature of ladies' magazines until two decades later. Brackman writes that *Godey's* and its competitors, *Graham's* and *Peterson's*, published many quilt designs in the 1850s and 1860s—often the same patterns, "since plagiarism was common...even the designs that were not blatantly copied from English magazines followed English-style construction in what may have been an editorial attempt to uplift the common patchwork quilt" (*Clues* 21).

Even into the 1880s and 1890s, Brackman continues, some editors "filled with missionary zeal" suggested that quilt styles should follow current trends in decorating and fine art, calling for the use of silk and mosaic-style patchwork, neither of which were in use by quiltmakers of the day. Meanwhile, other editors printed patterns that more closely echoed the types of quilts their readers actually were making. "For the first time, a significant number of block-style, pieced designs appeared in print," writes Brackman (*Clues* 25).

* * *

The first quilt designers were employed by periodicals, from those like *Godey's*, with national appeal and distribution, to more regionalized publications like *The Ohio Farmer*, *The Dakota Farmer*, and *The Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman*. Syndicated quilt columns appeared in the ladies' pages throughout the first quarter of the twentieth century and were written by designers who employed pseudonyms such as Aunt Martha, Grandmother Clark, Hope Winslow, Nancy Cabot, Nancy Page, Patty Shannon, Laura Wheeler, and Alice Brooks. Because the patterns were printed in black and white, it was up to the author to prescribe colors. The Crystal Star block, published in 1934 by the *Kansas City Star*, included a caption that read, "This is a pattern that the most inexperienced quilt maker may use with confidence. Use any two colors desired....Lemon yellow and green are good choices." Suddenly, there were published opinions about what designs and colors constituted a "good" choice. That meant that there were "bad" choices and, therefore, bad quilts. Quiltmakers loosened their grip on the dark palette and scrappy make-do aesthetic of their mothers; they began to purchase yards and yards of white and pastel fabrics, and they began to follow columnists' advice.

Around this time, enterprising quiltmakers began to imagine their own names next to a published pattern. Many quiltmakers, after all, had been devising their own patchwork patterns for decades. Now, they saw that there was perhaps a little bit of money—and maybe a little bit of distinction as well—to be had in the doing. The cottage industries that sprang to life during the years leading up the Depression, as well as the

increase in the marketing of quilting materials through the Montgomery Ward and Sears, Roebuck, and Company catalogs, lead to the commercialization of the industry.

Hall and Kretsinger decried this commercialization, both claiming that it destroyed the virtue of quilting as one of the few simple joys in life. Writes

Kretsinger:

In the early days, the one aim and ambition of the Colonial woman seemed towards increasing the efficiency and happiness of life. Her stitches were lasting and executed with a loving hand, with disregard for length of time involved in the accomplishment. Today, although there seems to be a marked interest and revival of quilting, yet [sic] there is also a feeling of commercialization which tends towards lowering its sincerity and individuality as a needle art. (261)

According to Hall, the renaming of quilt patterns was another symptom of the disease of commercialization. The names of traditional quilt blocks—names like Churn Dash, Mill Wheel, Crown of Thorns, Jacob's Ladder, Yankee Pride, and Burgoyne Surrounded—reflected lives filled with hard work, religious devotion, and patriotism. It stands to reason that Hall, who had collected and cataloged more than one thousand examples of antique blocks during her life, would be disgusted by money-making tactics that threatened to erase the history of the craft to which she had devoted herself:

"It is a fact to be deplored that, for commercial purposes, the old time patterns are being offered for sale under newly-coined names, thus destroying all the romance attached to the names familiar in Colonial and Pioneer days" (19).

It was not just the original names of quilt patterns that Hall romanticized. She also lauded the mental capacity of early quiltmakers by asking: "Who shall say that a woman's mind is inferior to a man's, when, with no knowledge of mathematics, these women worked out geometric designs so intricate, and co-related each patch to all

others in the block?" (14). Looked at from this perspective, early quilts are evidence not only of a woman's resourcefulness, but also of her intellect. A quilt, by this definition, is a quiltmaker's intellectual property. Kretsinger took a different approach to the question of intellect, claiming, "Within [women's] needlework we find the story of their very existence....By the artistic character of their productions we may judge of the mental development of the people and of their domestic conditions" (259). Here, once again, the fundamental duality of quilting is articulated. Hall's remarks praise the mathematics and logic involved in the making of an original quilt—the left-brained approach to quilting, the *craft* of it—whereas Kretsinger's remarks honor the quiltmaker's creative nature—the right-brained approach, the *art*.

The reason there was a demand for original quilt patterns one hundred years ago is the same reason there is a demand for original quilt patterns today, and that reason is rooted in this duality. Many of today's novice quiltmakers feel that they are deficient in one aspect or the other, and as a result, they lack the confidence to make quilts of their own design. Besides that, the investment of time and money required to make a quilt is prohibitive. Who can afford to experiment with both her reason and her imagination and be wrong? It's much safer, and for some perhaps more rewarding, for a quiltmaker to find a pattern for a quilt she likes, to purchase materials that are identical or similar to those called for by the pattern's designer, and to know from the moment she cuts out the first patch what her final product will look like at the end of the arduous process.

Webster's comments on the subject of the mental capacity of quiltmakers are perhaps the harshest. She writes that, at a county fair, the display of needlework "produced by the womenfolk" serves two functions. The first is to provide the more creative and capable needleworkers with a venue for competition. And the second?

It also serves as an inspiration to those who are denied the faculty of creating original designs, yet nevertheless have taken keen pleasure in the production of beautiful needlework. It is to this latter class that an exhibition of quilts is of real value, because it provides them with new patterns that can be applied to the quilts which must be made. (138)

In the next chapter, we'll look more closely at the evolution of the public exhibition of quilts, not only as a venue for inspiration gathering, as Webster describes, but also as an indicator of our current quilt revival.

Chapter 4

The Growing Popularity of Quilt Exhibitions

Every late October, thousands of business people from around the world travel to Houston, Texas, to attend International Quilt Market, the quilt industry's only trade show. Then, the following week, tens of thousands of quilters converge there, too, for International Quilt Festival, one of the largest and most highly regarded quilt shows and contests in the world. Just to have a quilt accepted into the festival's judged show, "Quilts: A World of Beauty," is, for many quilters, a pinnacle achievement.

The International Quilt Association (IQA) organizes and produces the show, and every September, officers send letters of invitation to the quilters who have earned an award. At this point, the quilter who receives such a letter knows only that her or his work has earned a ribbon, but not which ribbon. First-, second-, and third-place awards plus one or two honorable mentions in each of twenty-two contest categories join three judge's choice awards, a viewer's choice award, and, of course, the nine big-cash awards—the best of show award (\$10,000) and the founders award (\$7,500) among them—to make dozens of opportunities for quilters to take home a cash prize. In 2009, contest winners took home a staggering sum of \$96,250 in cash. It's no wonder that a

quilter who receives a letter of invitation to the winner circle celebration, always held the night before the doors open on International Quilt Festival, books travel to Houston almost immediately.

I had attended Market since 2005 but had never stayed in Houston long enough to go to Festival. In 2009, however, I was attending as the editor-in-chief of *Quilters Newsletter* magazine, one of the contest sponsors. As such, it was my responsibility to present the awards to the winners in the traditional appliqué category, so I extended my stay and wrote a little speech, as the president of the IQA had asked me to do.

I pictured folding chairs, maybe 100 people gathered before a microphone on a makeshift stage somewhere on the brightly lit show floor to hear the list of winners' names read aloud. The reality was quite different. The winner circle celebration takes place in the convention center's largest ballroom. Thousands attend. A spotlight trained on the stage, which is six steps up off the floor, provides the only light in the room, and the walls are draped in black.

Once I absorbed the dramatic effect of the ceremony's setting, a twinge of stage fright settled in. This was the academy awards of quiltmaking, after all. How had I expected anything less?

As the show began, the pageantry swelled. The first sponsor took the stage, delivered her speech in praise of the IQA's service to the world of quiltmaking, and then announced the third-place winner in her category. When the quiltmaker mounted the stairs to the stage, the sponsor, to the accompaniment of thunderous applause, handed her a bouquet of flowers and a large envelope, and then the pair posed for a

professional photographer. The audience lit up as the spectators snapped their own photos of the lucky winner. Second place was announced—flowers, envelope, applause, and smiles for the flashing cameras. Then, first place. The spotlight swung over to the left of the audience, and one of the black drapes rose to reveal the first blue-ribbon quilt. The noise swelled as the audience members rose to their feet in the dark ballroom to honor the winner with an ovation and the loudest applause of all.

This process was repeated over and over for the next two and a half hours. One by one, the black drapes rose to reveal the winning quilts in each category, until, at last, we were surrounded by the year's finest quilts. I was amazed by the number of quiltmakers who had traveled not only from across the United States, but also from overseas—from Korea and Japan and Canada and Australia—in the hopes that their work would be honored in such a significant and meaningful way. And I have to admit, I was pleased to have been a part of the evening in my own small way, too.

* * *

The quilt show has come a long way in the last hundred years. Today's glamorous, high-stakes affairs started out as church-basement socials or sideshows at county and state fairs. In 1915, Marie Webster expressed her rather sour opinion of the growing popularity of the quilt exhibition:

To view the real impromptu exhibitions of quilts—for which, by the way, no admission fee is charged—one should drive along any country road on a bright sunny day in early spring. It is at this time that the household bedding is given its annual airing, and consequently long lines hung with quilts are frequent and interesting sights. During this periodical airing there becomes apparent a seemingly close alliance between patchwork and nature, as upon the soft green background of new leaves the beauty of the quilts is thrown into greater prominence....Gentle breezes stir the

quilts so that their designs and colours gain in beauty as they slowly wave to and fro. (147)

That Webster calls the natural exhibit of quilts “real”—the annual airing of homemade bedding was, after all, a necessary chore as emblematic of making do as was the bedding itself—and points out that the enjoyment of such exhibits is free makes clear how she feels about the contrived, indoor exhibits that were becoming popular in her day. Webster goes on to say:

This periodical airing spreads from neighbour to neighbour, and as one sunny day follows another all the clothes lines become weighted with burdens of brightest hues. Of course, there is no rivalry between owners, or no unworthy desire to show off....It has been suggested that at an exhibition is the logical place to see quilts bloom. Yet...it is much like massing our wild Sweet Williams, Spring Beauties, and Violets in a crowded greenhouse. They bravely do their best, but you can fairly see them gasping for the fresh, free air of their woodland homes. A quilt hung on a clothes line...receives twice the appreciation given one which is sedately folded across a wire with many others in a crowded, jealous row. (147-48)

To personify quilts in such a way is quite romantic—the quilts themselves, in Webster’s metaphor, would rather be hung in the sunny outdoors than be forced to brave display in a place rife with the rivalry and jealousy of their makers. Webster does, however, concede that the county and state fairs of her day were responsible for the making of many fine quilts, noting that the possibility of public recognition and “the premiums which accompany this recognition” drove quiltmakers to consider carefully their choices of color and design and to make their stitching as perfect as possible (143).

Carrie Hall, too, expressed bitter sentiments about quilt shows, calling them “most pretentious” events “where countless throngs admire [quilts] and envy the fortunate owners” (16). That both Webster and Hall call attention to the quilt show as

an arena that fosters envy among quiltmakers and quilt owners is possibly a testament to their time, when envy and her counterpart, pride, were two of the seven deadly sins to be avoided in all areas of life. The idea of the “humility block”—a quilt block intentionally made incorrectly or set sideways in a finished quilt to demonstrate that only God is perfect—most likely originated much earlier, but was certainly perpetuated throughout the early twentieth century and lives on today. However, contemporary quilt historians have been unable to substantiate claims that design errors in early quilts were deferential. Rather, they hypothesize that such errors were unplanned and that it was much easier for a quiltmaker to call her mistake an exercise in modesty than it was for her to rip out hours’ worth of stitching to correct it.

The myth of the humility block has been rejected by historians Bobbie Aug and Bettina Havig, both of whom have studied Amish quilts and quilters extensively. They agree that the iconic quilters, who are known for consistently producing perfect quilts, find the notion of a humility block absurd. Those that Aug interviewed felt that erring on purpose was more prideful than making a perfect quilt, since to do so was to call greater attention to one’s capacity for perfection. And according to Havig, Amish quilters would laugh at the notion of a humility block and admit that they make enough mistakes without making them on purpose.

The myth has also been rejected by Barbara Brackman, who wrote an article on the topic. “The Deliberate Error” appeared in the June 1988 issue of *Quilters Newsletter*. In her essay, Brackman claims to have found only one brief mention of the practice in all of the twentieth century’s writings about quilts. This was in Florence Peto’s 1949 book

American Quilts and Coverlets (Chanticleer Press). Peto describes a quilt onto which was stitched one mismatched piece of chintz:

The artifice was deliberate and not the expedience of a quiltmaker who had run out of matching material. In certain localities superstitious quiltmakers tried this way to divert the "Evil Eye" which otherwise might be cast jealously on human endeavor; it was analogous to the Oriental idea that to make a perfect thing is to imitate the Deity, therefore unlucky and presumptuous.

Brackman notes that Peto provided no sources and did not specify to which "certain localities" she was referring. Furthermore, Brackman claims that many historians who study Oriental rugmaking also consider the notion of humility errors false. She sums up her argument by saying, "Although most contemporary quiltmakers know the custom, few follow it—probably because today accuracy and perfection are valued more than humility."

It's possible, however, that early twentieth-century quiltmakers, as well as both Webster and Hall, would forgive themselves and each other a little envy and pride in light of the transgression committed at the 1933 Sears National Quilt Contest.

* * *

In January 1933, the city of Chicago, Illinois, was preparing to host the World's Fair, the theme of which would be "A Century of Progress." Sears, Roebuck, and Company saw an opportunity to ignite enthusiasm among American women for the event—and to make a little money, too. At the time, quiltmakers could purchase from the Sears catalog everything they needed to make a quilt. What better way to inflate the market for fabric and thread than to hold a quiltmaking contest?

The call for entries was printed inside the front cover of the January 1933 edition of the catalog. It said, "Make Sears building your headquarters when you visit the World's Fair," and it advertised a total of \$7,500 in prizes for the contest. The grand prize was \$1,000, plus a \$200 bonus if the winning quilt was of original design that commemorated the fair's theme. Further incentive was that the winning quilts were to be exhibited in the Sears building during the fair. According to Merikay Waldvogel and Barbara Brackman, coauthors of the 1993 book *Patchwork Souvenirs of the 1933 World's Fair*, a new Ford cost \$490 at the time, and a three-bedroom house \$3,000. They write, "Translated into today's dollars, the award equals about \$20,000" (34). That's twice the sum given to the best-of-show winner at International Quilt Festival in 2009!

With a May 15 deadline, quiltmakers had only a few months to complete their entries. Despite the time crunch, 24,878 entrants responded, many having made their first quilt ever especially for the contest and many incorporating the words "A Century of Progress" onto their quilts, either in colorful appliqué or in more subtle embroidery or quilting designs. They submitted their quilts to their local Sears stores for regional judging and hoped their works would be declared semifinalists and shipped to Chicago for the final round of evaluation. Sears, delighted with the overwhelming response, snapped a public relations photo of two men in a room piled high with boxes wrapped in paper and string. Some of the parcels spilled down into the center of the room, where the men posed with a magnifying glass held over an unfurled quilt as though they were examining the stitches and evaluating the workmanship (Waldvogel and Brackman 36).

Little did Sears executives know, even then, that nearly 80 years later, their little contest would still hold the records for the number of quilts entered into a contest and the amount of prize money offered. *Good Housekeeping's* 1978 contest, which marks the beginning of the current quilt revival, attracted less than 10,000 entries—fewer than half as many as were entered in the 1933 contest.

Sears selected four women and one man to judge its national contest: Wisconsin quilt shop owner Mary McElwain; *Good Housekeeping* needlework editor Ann Orr; Sears employee and contest organizer Sue Roberts; Art Institute of Chicago director Robert B. Harshe; and American Farm Bureau Federation employee Mrs. Charles Sewell. Mrs. Sewell was not present at the actual judging, and Robert Harshe was replaced by his assistant, Beth Burnett (Waldvogel and Brackman 42).

The judges named Margaret Caden of Lexington, Kentucky, the grand prize winner. Her quilt was a traditional and rather unremarkable pattern rendered in two colors: white and pale gray-green. The workmanship, however, was impeccable. The hand piecing was flawless, and the quilting was an astonishing sixteen stitches to the inch, according to those who had seen the quilt in person, but it was the stuffed quilting that earned it top honors (Waldvogel and Brackman 46).

Caden and two of her five sisters, none of them married and all of them quite wealthy, owned and operated the A. M. Caden Gift Shop and sold needlework supplies, among other things, to ladies who were part of Lexington's horse-racing scene. After her win, Caden quickly became celebrated as "America's Champion Quilter." Her quilt was called "The Unknown Star," and although it is sometimes referred to as the "Quilt of the

Century," Caden renamed it "Star of the Bluegrass" and almost immediately began to sell mail-order kits for reproductions of her contest quilt.

It sounds like a dream come true, but the story of Margaret Caden and her \$1,000 prize-winning quilt taints the history of the world's largest quilt contest. The problem is that "America's Champion Quilter" contributed not a single stitch to the "Quilt of the Century" and that she shared not a single cent of the exorbitant prize with any of the four women who did.

One of Margaret's responsibilities at the A. M. Caden Gift Shop was to coordinate the hiring of poor, rural seamstresses to finish her customers' quilt tops and to make sample projects to display in the store. From this stable of stitchers, Caden employed Mattie Clark Black to stuff "featherlike leaf designs into green strips and squares"; she employed Ida Atchison Rhorer to piece the stuffed patches together with the white patches to complete the quilt top; and she employed Allie Taylor Price and her daughter, Ruth Price Stewart, to quilt the crosshatch design behind the stuffed work (Waldvogel and Brackman 54).

Knowing that much of quilting in early twentieth-century America was completed on a for-hire basis, some might not consider the origins of the winning quilt all that shocking. It's the fact that Margaret Caden signed the requisite statement on the entry form to certify "that this quilt is entirely of my own making" that fixes Caden in quiltmakers' collective memory as the most unethical character in quilt history.

Waldvogel and Brackman speculate that Caden purposely avoided the suspicions of her small community by circumventing the regional judging:

The Cadens' choice to mail their entry to the Sears mail-order house in Chicago rather than to a closer regional mail-order house for the initial judging is provocative. The Cadens may have realized that judges in the southeastern regions would know, to use the words of one of today's Lexington quilters, that "Margaret Caden did not know which end of a needle to thread." The far-away judges at the Chicago mail-order center found the quilt to be the best of the entries shipped to them. (55)

The husbands of Mattie Black, Ida Rhorer, and Allie Price were either out of work or unable to work during the Depression, so these skilled seamstresses were their families' breadwinners. They relied on Margaret Caden to continue to send them work, and they knew that laying claim to any part of the prize money, or even merely asking for a little acknowledgement, either publically or in private, would certainly jeopardize their abilities to put food on their tables. It was their daughters who, decades later, finally spoke out against the injustice their mothers had suffered. Helen Black, Mattie's daughter-in-law, remembers that Mattie felt powerless to speak up about her role in the making of the winning quilt, and Louise Rhorer Eddleman shared in a 1989 telephone interview with Robert Cogswell that her mother had seen the results of the contest printed in a newspaper (Waldvogel and Brackman 55). What a terrible way to find out that a quilt you had been paid less than \$1 per hour of your time to make had earned your employer such a sizeable prize—and to know that she had lied in order to collect that prize.

The authors conclude their account of the story of the 1933 Sears National Quilt Contest by conceding that because quiltmaking in the early part of the twentieth century was cooperative in nature, the Caden quilt was most definitely not the only

group quilt entered. Yet they are not willing to so easily let Margaret Caden off the hook. They write:

Only in the present quilt revival dating from the 1970s do quiltmakers feel obligated to complete the entire process from choosing fabric, through marking, cutting, sewing, and quilting....Certainly, the staff at Sears who wrote the contest rules requiring a statement that the quilt was entirely the work of the entrant had little understanding of the system of shared work then in effect in America's quiltmaking community....Margaret Caden...carried the concept of a cooperative project to extremes that would have been considered immoral even in the era of the professional quilter. Furthermore, no excuses can be made for a woman who did not share the enormous cash prize with the rest of her team....The story of the Caden quilt adds a bittersweet reality to the memories of the...biggest quilt contest ever held. (61)

Regardless of the now-known controversy that shrouds the 1933 contest, the event will always mark a significant turn in the history of quilts and their makers. It was a brief flare that resulted in the making of tens of thousands of quilts and garnered a renewed interest in the domestic arts of generations past—at least until the start of World War II, when women had to take jobs outside their homes, and those who did have leisure time laid aside their quilting and took up knitting to make woolen socks for American the soldiers fighting in Europe. The less glamorous quilt shows of the time—those held in church basements on Saturdays or in side tents at county or state agricultural fairs—may pale in comparison to the spectacle of the Sears contest, but they also played an important role in quilt history. These shows, and early writers' accounts of them, help us remember that prize money and public recognition generally were not the impetus driving women to make quilts, and that the more humble the origins of a quilt, the stronger the emotional connection forged between it and its maker's loved ones could be.

Marie Webster notes that quilts made for some sentimental reason—for a wedding, for a birthday, or to commemorate some historic occasion—were less likely to be used on beds and, therefore, damaged by light and wear. Such quilts were “jealously hidden in closet and linen chest,” even if they were not particularly beautiful or well made (145). These are the very quilts described by Juliet Strauss of Rockville, Indiana, who decided to organize a Saturday afternoon quilt show in her hometown, even though she had no idea how to orchestrate such an affair.

Strauss was known as “The Country Contributor” for the column she had begun to pen in the *Indianapolis News* in 1903; she later wrote a monthly column for *The Ladies’ Home Journal* called “Ideas of a Plain Country Woman,” and a selection of these columns was compiled by Doubleday, Page & Co. and published in 1908 as a book by the same name (Webster 191). In describing the day before her quilt show, Strauss recounts anxious moments of worry that more quilts than she could possibly handle would be brought in for display, and she admits that on the morning of the show, that worry proved warranted. A steady stream of members from her community brought in quilts by the dozen—a staggering amount for any one person to hang before the one o’clock deadline when the doors to the show were scheduled to open. With the help of friends and family—and a carpenter, too—all 118 quilts were hung on wires and ropes, and the show opened on time.

After her comical and self-effacing report of the haphazard way the show came together, Strauss recalls the more sentimental aspect of the day:

One lovely feature of this quilt show was the reverence with which men brought to us the quilts their mothers made. Plain farmers, busy workers,

retired businessmen, came to us, their faces softened to tenderness, handed us, with mingled pride and devotion, their big bundle containing a contribution to the display, saying in softened accents, "My mother made it." And each and every quilt brought thus was worthy of a price on its real merit—not for its hallowed association alone. (Webster 141-42)

Strauss goes on to assess that "fully two-thirds of the quilts entered deserved prizes," a rather charitable evaluation of the quality of the quilts entered into any show, past or present, especially one that welcomed all quilts, whether from a bed, a closet, or a linen chest. I suspect she was so pleased by the last-minute success of her endeavor that she felt particularly generous in her appraisal; I also suspect that she was not a discerning judge of quilts, as the scope of her published commentary was focused on a much wider range of women's domestic concerns. Still, the scene she relates is a valid one, however romantic, and underscores the sentiment we attach to the quilts our foremothers made, or even to the quilts we ourselves make.

* * *

The quilt shows of today serve all the same functions as the quilt shows of a hundred years ago. They inspire awe; they encourage viewers to learn new skills or try new techniques; they provide an arena for competition among the top quilters of a region or country; and they provide a public venue where quiltmakers of all skill levels can show off their work and thereby experience a sense of pride and accomplishment.

The two foremost quilt associations in the United States, the International Quilt Association (IQA) and the American Quilter's Society (AQS), have both gone from holding one annual show to holding several annual shows. The IQA has produced the International Quilt Festival every autumn in Houston, Texas, since 1979; every spring in

Rosemont, Illinois, since 2003; and every July in Long Beach, California, since 2008.

Likewise, the AQS has produced its annual quilt show and contest every April in Paducah, Kentucky, since 1985; every July in Nashville, Tennessee, since 2001 (this show was relocated to Knoxville in 2008); and every October in Des Moines, Iowa, since 2008. In March 2010, the AQS will add a fourth annual event in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, the cradle of Amish quiltmaking.

The addition of this fourth show demonstrates a bit of shrewd business savvy on the part of the AQS. The Quilters' Heritage Celebration (QHC) had been held annually in Lancaster for 22 years when producers announced that the April 2009 show would be the last—unless a buyer came forward. Instead of buying the show, the AQS launched their own event, though they scheduled it for March rather than April so as not to interfere with their longstanding Paducah show. When the AQS announced the launch, many in the industry, myself included, heaved a sigh of relief, assuming that AQS had purchased the QHC, had swooped in with great benevolence to save the adored event. However, as of January 2, 2010, a statement posted at the QHC's website, www.qhconline.com, read, "Please note that the show currently being planned and advertised for Lancaster, PA, has no affiliation whatsoever with Quilters' Heritage Celebration." The AQS is, I'm sure, well aware that the timing of their launch has made a misguided impression on the industry; however, they have posted absolutely nothing on their website, www.americanquilter.com, to clear up the confusion.

The scramble in recent years by national organizations to produce more and more quilt shows has many questioning whether the industry can support so many

events. And it's truly too soon to tell whether they can, especially since they are competing not just with each other, but also with dozens of other smaller shows with national or regional appeal. Mancuso Show Management produces seven annual quilt shows—in Virginia, New Jersey, Colorado, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, California, and Florida. Among the most popular independent shows are Road to California, Indiana Heritage Quilt Show, Dallas Quilt Celebration, the National Quilting Association's annual show in Ohio, Vermont Quilt Festival, Quilt Odyssey in Pennsylvania, and the biennial show of the Association of Pacific Northwest Quilters in Seattle. Add to these the annual shows devoted to machine quilting—Machine Quilters Exposition, Home Machine Quilting Show, and Machine Quilters Showcase—and the vendors who make their livings trucking their wares from show to show can expect very little time at home each year.

For every show, organizers must book dozens of high-profile quilt teachers and lecturers to draw attendees, and they must draw enough attendees to attract vendors to fill their vendor malls. They must arrange for special exhibits assembled by big-name curators that will have wide appeal to general audiences. They must secure sponsors who will supply sizeable sums of cash or big-ticket products, like computerized sewing machines that retail anywhere between \$6,000 and \$11,000, or even a longarm machine that retails for up to \$30,000, to attract entries for their contests. It's an expensive and time-consuming proposition that keeps a lot of small businesses ticking.

Besides all these things that quilters have come to expect from every show they attend, there's another aspect of the modern quilt show that warrants consideration:

the judging. For every show, there is a panel of judges who must decide which quilts are the best of the best, and which makers deserve the accolades and exorbitant prizes that are up for grabs.

The National Quilting Association (NQA), founded in 1970, just a few years before the current quilt revival truly took hold, established the first certification program for quilt judges. The program was founded in 1979, and today it remains the only such program in the United States.

Anyone outside the quilt industry might be surprised to learn how rigorous this program is. To be considered for candidacy, an applicant must have already judged at least three contests within the five years prior to her application date. Of the three contests, one must have been judged alongside an NQA-certified judge, and one must have included at least thirty-five quilts. The enrollment period can be as long as five years, during which time the candidate must volunteer to aid certified judges at national shows and must, of course, maintain her paid membership to the NQA. When she feels she is ready, the candidate must complete extensive paperwork—"the completion of paperwork is a lengthy process requiring the candidate to investigate and study a wide range of quilting skills and techniques," according to the NQA's website, <http://nqaquilts.org/judges.php>—and must submit it by December 31 to be eligible for a panel review the following June. The panel review is a pass-or-fail interview and mock judging with three certified judges, and each candidate has only two opportunities to pass, or else she must enroll in the program a second time.

During her candidacy, a prospective judge learns to evaluate quilts based on two major categories: workmanship, and appearance and design. The recognition of good workmanship requires that the judge learn to look for solid construction, which encompasses straight, secure seams stitched with the appropriate thread type and color; precisely pieced patchwork with sharp corners and points and smooth curves; securely stitched, pucker-free appliqué; and no shadowing of dark fabrics under light ones. She must also evaluate the quilting stitches, the binding, and any special techniques, like embroidery, beading, or photo transfer.

The judging of a quilt's appearance and design is, of course, less straightforward. To generate a list of criteria, the NQA has fallen back on—what else?—the elements and principles of design. “Line, shape, color, texture, and value should be used effectively to produce an interesting, balanced, and well-proportioned design,” according to information the NQA has posted at <http://nqaquilts.org/judgesabout.php>.

There are two methods of judging quilts—the point system and the elimination system. The NQA favors the latter. Under the points system, each criterion is worth a certain number of points, usually totaling one hundred, and is evaluated separately so that the quilt's total score can very easily be added up. After the contest, each quiltmaker receives from the judges not constructive feedback, but a list of numbers with no explanation of how those numbers were assigned. Under the elimination system, however, each quilt's strengths and weaknesses are assessed by each judge, who then provides a written narrative. The judges deliberate, then come to a consensus about which quilts should be assigned the first-, second-, and third-place ribbons in each

category. At most shows, each judge may also award one judge's choice ribbon to a quilt that did not earn one of the category ribbons. The NQA's website says:

No judging system is perfect...but most NQA judges find that the elimination system is faster and offers more of a chance to thoroughly evaluate all the techniques actually used in the construction of the quilt. When taken in the right spirit, the comments on the critique sheet can be a great learning tool for the quiltmaker. Periodically, we all have to be reminded that only the quilt is being judged, not the quiltmaker.

Currently, the NQA lists seventy-five certified quilt judges on its website, and each is in high demand by the organizers of national show. Beverly Fine, the NQA's current judge certification program coordinator, says she is aware of one or two small judge certification programs that have come and gone, and she has received inquiries from quilters in such countries as Australia, New Zealand, and Africa who wish to enroll in the NQA's program. Fine says, "Because our program emphasizes mentoring, this poses obvious geographical challenges, but we are open to accepting aspiring judges from anywhere." For now, the NQA has cornered the market on quilt judge certification.

Say "quilt show" to a dedicated quilter, and you will most likely call to her mind images of the grand, commercial affairs that the contemporary show has become. Yes, the simple, small-town, for-one-afternoon-only quilt exhibits still have their role in today's quilt world, but the reality is that Marie Webster was right. The growing popularity of quilt exhibitions today, along with their growing number and size, indicates without a doubt that we are still in the thick of our modern quilt revival.

Chapter 5

The Future of Quiltmaking in America

Marie Webster's claim that there are three kinds of evidence of a quilt revival—the increasing demand for competent quilters, the desire for new quilt patterns, and the growing popularity of quilt exhibitions—are certainly not the only benchmarks by which a revival can be recognized or defined. However, they will be the first things to disappear once interest in quiltmaking begins again to decline, whenever that might be. If the frenetic pace of today's quiltmaking slows, the services of for-hire quilters and quilt designers will no longer be in such high demand. Attendance at national and regional quilt shows will wane, and both the grand scale and the frequency of these events will too. This decline will be felt by all; it will alert the sole proprietorships and the international corporations alike, and the quilt world will brace itself for the inevitable shift. Successful product manufacturers and service providers will once again set their sights on the dedicated quilter, as they will expect fewer beginners to be interested in learning the craft. Other companies will chase the ex-quilters in an attempt to grab shares of the new markets—knitting, maybe, or weaving, garment making, embroidery, or home-decoration sewing. Many companies will simply close up shop.

Bleak as this may sound, the reality is much brighter. The quiltmaking industry is still in a period of growth and expansion, and it's impossible to say when interest in the craft will decline, as it is sure to do, if history is any indicator. It could be five years from now, it could be five decades from now, but my purpose in looking at the two quilt revivals of the twentieth century is not to predict when the current revival will end. Rather, it is to identify trends that will keep interest in quiltmaking alive in the twenty-first century.

First, I predict that the attractiveness of the mechanization of quiltmaking in the last ten years or so will be reversed, leading to a revival of interest in handwork. Some in the industry might not think this is a particularly remarkable prediction, as trends have oscillated between hand and machine techniques for years. I recently spoke with international quilt teacher Ami Simms about this, and she confirmed that as the demand for her hand-appliqué and hand-quilting classes rises, the demand for her machine-based classes falls, and vice versa. She says that this pattern repeats itself every two or three years. In fact, in 2007, I took Ami's hand-quilting class at a large quilt symposium. I was one of only five students who had elected to take this particular class. When Ami explained that there were far better needles and thimbles available than any of those we had brought, we all trooped down to the hall of the hotel, past the full-to-capacity ballrooms in which machine-technique classes were being taught, to the little onsite quilt shop that had been set up for the event. To our disappointment, the proprietors had not stocked a single item for hand sewing.

When I shared this memory with Ami, she laughed. "Definitely a low point for hand work," she said. "But you know, we really don't want hand work to come back full force."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because then people would make one quilt per year at best, not five or six or ten or twelve. The demand for fabric and other materials would fall drastically. The whole industry would suffer."

Of course, Ami is right. This makes my forecast a little ominous, as I am predicting not just another peak or valley in a predictable trend pattern, but a large-scale, more lasting return to an interest in hand work. For as lovely as machine-made quilts have become, and for as much skill—and expensive, space-constraining, computerized equipment—is required to make them, the sense of awe viewers feel when they stand before a quilt equally lovely but made entirely by hand is portentous. That show organizers are doing their part to make the judging of quilts as fair as possible by adding and dividing and subdividing contest categories also supports this prediction. It seems it is no longer satisfactory to win a blue ribbon when the accolades are immediately followed by the inquiry, "In which category?" Some categories carry more prestige than others, and the handmade category is one of them. This category at the International Quilt Festival in Houston is, year after year, populated by quilts made by Japanese quiltmakers. These women have set the bar extremely high—hundreds of thousands of tiny patches stitched together with nothing more than needle and thread into intricate works of art—and it's easy to feel a bit shamefaced when you see how

they have improved upon a traditionally American craft. There is pressure on quiltmakers in the United States to take back their heritage, and I believe that will begin, and soon, with reclaiming traditional hand-stitching techniques. Further research on this can be done by looking at the hand-quilting groups who have stayed the course throughout the twentieth century. Where are these groups? What drove them to keep hand quilting alive? How do they view the future of handwork in American quilting? And what trends have they noticed in the quilting industry over the years?

Despite my guess that handwork will enjoy a resurgence in the twenty-first century, I do not believe that quilting by machine will ever completely fall out of popular favor. The mechanization of quilting is another subject worthy of closer study, a subject that would encompass not only the evolution of sewing, embroidery, and quilting machines, but also the plethora of other contraptions fabricated to make a quilter's life easier and her task quicker and more enjoyable. Early quilters expressed pride that quilting had avoided falling prey to industrialization. "It is the only one of the home-craft arts that has withstood the machine age," wrote Hall (27). Kretsinger agreed: "At this busy time in our history we are growing tired of machine-made things, and women are turning more and more toward the old Colonial arts" (268). Webster, of course, expressed a similar sentiment:

In its suitability for manufacture within the home, the quilt possesses a peculiar merit. Although exposed for a full century to the competition of machinery, under the depressing influence of which most of the fireside crafts have all but vanished, the making of quilts as a home industry has never languished. Its hold on the affections of womankind has never been stronger than it is today....The selection of design, the care in piecing, the patience in quilting; all make for feminine contentment and domestic happiness. (xxii)

I can't help but speculate that these women would regard today's die- and strip-cutting machines, rotary cutters, bobbin winders, electric scissors, professional-grade steam irons, quilt design software, and various independently manufactured machine attachments—many of which have been introduced to the market in recent years and have enjoyed varying degrees of success—with mixed emotions. Would they be appalled to learn that their beloved craft had succumbed to the machine age, or would they concede that such tools have actually been the agents of increased “feminine contentment and domestic happiness?”

Second, I predict a globalization of a quilting aesthetic. Until recently, it has been rather easy to pigeonhole a quilt as having originated in a particular country. The Japanese aesthetic is one example. In fact, the contest at the Tokyo International Great Quilt Festival, held annually in Tokyo, Japan, includes a category called “Wa” that is reserved for the quilts that most fully embody the Japanese spirit or culture. Some Wa quilts include representational imagery—fat, orange koi swimming in a pond, a silhouette of a snow-capped Mount Fuji—but many are abstract and convey Wa simply with color, pattern, and texture. It's very difficult to explain a Wa quilt in words, but to the trained eye, these quilts are simple to spot.

My own understanding of this aesthetic was challenged last fall, when *Quilters Newsletter* was asked to choose a winning quilt for the 2009 International Quilt Week Yokohama, another annual quilt event in Japan. Because *Quilters Newsletter* sponsors this affair, one of the awards is presented in our name. Judging was difficult, as we could not see the quilts in person, but had to select the winner based on high-resolution

digital photographs on a CD. Our small staff gathered around the art director's computer and watched a slideshow of the forty or so quilt images play through several times before we each chose our favorites. From there, the decision was easy. One quilt landed in each staffer's top three. We had a winner.

I emailed the Quilt Week organizers the names of the winning quilt and the woman who had made it. I thought that was that. But the next day, they had emailed me back with a request: Could I please explain why *Quilters Newsletter* had chosen this particular quilt? My explanation would be read aloud at the awards ceremony.

I was stuck. I pulled the image of that quilt up on my screen and stared at it for what seemed like hours. I zoomed in. I zoomed out. I zoomed in again. Why had we all liked this quilt so much? I started second guessing our decision. Almost all the quilts had been very obviously Japanese, and our choice had been a Japanese quilt. But what did the Japanese think when they looked at this quilt? Would they say to one another, "Well, of course the Americans would choose *that* one." Had we been expected to choose a Japanese quilt? Would it have been considered a cultural slight to have chosen one of the few entries from Europe, Australia, and the United States? The first few drafts of my explanation came off sounding defensive and flat. In the end, I tried to push the whole situation out of my mind and put together a few sentences of genuine praise for this one quilt. I wrote:

The staff of *Quilters Newsletter* had a difficult time selecting a winning quilt this year, as there were so many lovely and masterfully made quilts entered. However, as we began to narrow down our choices, it seemed our eyes were drawn again and again to one quilt in particular. The soft restful colors of the quilt's background contrasted beautifully with its sharp, asymmetrical, scrappy appliquéd flowers and leaves to create a

pleasing sense of balance and harmony. That is why we chose Earth Trees, Earth Flowers by Yuko Kosaka.

Truthfully, this could have been said about nearly every quilt entered in this competition, as Japanese quiltmakers make “balance” and “harmony” seem effortless, whether they are juxtaposing brightly colored appliqués comprised of sharp points and angles with a tranquil background of muted taupe and dusty blue-green (as Yuko Kosaka did with her winning quilt) or whether they are employing near perfect symmetry and a monochromatic color scheme. Describing Earth Trees, Earth Flowers was, I think, the closest I have ever come to putting the Japanese aesthetic into words—and it was grueling.

The Australians, too, produce quilts of a particular look. Walking up and down the aisles at Quilt Market in recent years, I noticed that several booths seemed to have very similar quilts displayed. These were made of warm yellows and dusty pastels, a look often called “shabby chic,” and many included simple, primitive hand-embroidered stitchery—houses, trees, flowers, and stick figures sporting ragdoll dresses and unruly hair. What these booths had in common was that they were all manned by Australian designers.

There is an English, a Welsh, and an Irish quilt aesthetic. There has been a recent quilt art movement in Europe. There are commonalities among the quilts being made today in South America. Each of these could be the topic of extensive study. But as more foreign quilt organizations produce festivals with “international” in the title, as more quilt teachers travel overseas to share their unique approaches to the craft, and as more

quilters become exposed to quilts from a more global perspective, I predict we will see fewer quilts that can be said to be characteristic of a particular country.

Third, I predict that the current quilt revival, which most agree began around 1976 in conjunction with America's bicentennial, will, from a historian's perspective, be split into "micro-revivals." In my research, I have learned that most of the change this craft has ever undergone has occurred in the last forty years. After a three-decade gap in the history of American quiltmaking, quilters picked up right where they left off. There were no significant innovations, no great leaps in aesthetic or technique (save for the compensations quilters made for the shift in materials available to them). The content of the first issue of *Quilters Newsletter* could as easily have been published in 1939 as it was in 1969. From then on, however, we have seen so much change that I venture to declare we can no longer really say "current revival" and refer to the last forty years of American quiltmaking. During this time, trends have come and gone and come back again, and the modernization of the craft has completely transformed it. The fortieth anniversary issue of *Quilters Newsletter* would be almost completely incomprehensible to a quilter in 1969.

Further research in the field of quilt history could be done from a variety of perspectives with a focus entirely on the last four decades years. The evolution of the quilt museums in the nation, for instance, has not yet been documented. Besides the Rocky Mountain Quilt Museum, the United States now boasts the New England Quilt Museum, the Virginia Quilt Museum, the San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles, the National Quilt Museum (formerly the Museum of the American Quilter's Society), the La

Conner Quilt Museum, the Lancaster Quilt and Textile Museum, the Wisconsin Museum of Quilts and Fiber Arts, the People's Place Quilt Museum, and the International Quilt Study Center and Museum, among others. (The Texas Quilt Museum in La Grange, Texas, and the Southeastern Quilt and Textile Museum in Carrollton, Georgia, are scheduled to open in 2011.) A closer look at how these museums operate, raise funds, book exhibits, attract visitors, and interact not only with their communities, but also with the quilt world at large would add much to the body of knowledge in this field.

No researcher has yet documented the origin and development of the National Quilting Association's quilt judge certification program and the American Quilter's Society's quilt appraisal certification program. In reading more about the two programs, I began to wonder why their parent organizations have encountered no significant competition, either from other entities or from each other. This worries me. While both programs require exhaustive study and practice, it's troublesome that any one institution has the sole power to prescribe how quilts should be judged or to recommend what value should be assigned to a quilt. A closer look at how these programs have evolved over the last few decades might reveal a need for a change, and might provide a blueprint for that change—or it might provide reassurance that no competition is required to keep the integrity of either program intact.

I also call for a more academic history of male quiltmakers. Carrie Hall mentions Charles Pratt, who was born in 1856 in Manchester, England, and who came to America in 1886:

He claims to be the champion quilter of the whole world, having in his possession over two hundred letters which testify to his supremacy in his chosen field. He goes from state to state, to exhibit his prize quilts, and has 393 prizes to his credit. (36)

Who was this man? Where are his quilts, his two hundred letters, his 393 prizes? What became of him? Of all the snippets I came across in my reading, this is the most tantalizing. Hall also mentions Charles Esterly, a farmer from Allentown, Pennsylvania, who “believes in art for art’s sake and burns the midnight oil making quilts because he loves them” (37). The descriptions of these men are snapshots of both ends of an extreme, and throughout history, male quilters have been everything in between. I have heard a few women in the industry make snide remarks about male quilters who have garnered acclaim—they remark that male quilters should not be considered special just because they are male, and that they should be judged by the quality of their work, just as women quilters are. But in my opinion, anyone crossing long-held gender boundaries to pursue a passion is worthy of, at the very least, curiosity. I am particularly interested in the men-only quilt retreats and online groups that have come to life in recent years. It is a new history that is being written right now, making this a perfect time to begin documentation.

Finally, the evolution of intellectual property rights as they relate to quilts and quiltmakers is fascinating. The case involving the rights to the quilts commissioned for the movie *How to Make an American Quilt* was the first of its kind, but it certainly

wasn't the last. Janet Jo Smith has collected court documents and rulings for many cases involving quilts and textiles, and when I attended her lecture at the Rocky Mountain Quilt Museum, I suggested that she write the book on quilts in the courtroom.

"If you don't, I will," I said.

"We'll do it together," she replied.

I hope so.

Works Cited

- Brackman, Barbara. *Clues in the Calico: A Guide to Identifying and Dating Antique Quilts*. McLean: EPM Publications, Inc., 1989. Print.
- . "The Deliberate Error: By Design or Actually by Chance?" *Quilters Newsletter* June 1988: 34+. Print.
- . *Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns*. Paducah: American Quilter's Society, 1993. Print.
- Brown v. McCormick, et al. Civil No. L-96-3450. United States District Court for the District of Maryland. 1999. Print.
- Hall, Carrie A., and Rose G. Kretsinger. *The Romance of the Patchwork Quilt in America*. New York: Bonanza Books, 1935. Print.
- Koval, Mary. Interview by Joyce Starr Johnson. "Quilters' S.O.S.—Save Our Stories." *The Alliance for American Quilts*. 2 Nov. 2001. Web. 1 Jan. 2010.
- Calhoun, Frances B., and Barbara Massengill. "Forum: Level the Playing Field." *Quilters Newsletter* Apr. 2008: 28. Print.
- NFO Research, Inc., and DP Research Solutions. *Quilting in America 2006*. Golden: CK Media and Quilts, Inc. 2006. Print.
- Nomura, Nao, and Janneken Smucker. "From Fibers to Fieldwork: A Multifaceted Approach to Re-examining Amish Quilts." *Uncoverings* 27 (2006): 123-155. Print.
- Parrish, Kathleen. "The Global Business of Amish Quilts." *Quilters Newsletter* Nov. 2006: 38-39. Print.
- Patchwork Lives*. Nebraska State Historical Society and International Quilt Study Center. 28 Oct. 2005. Web. 2 Jan. 2010. <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/sites/mnh/patchwork_lives/showing_off.htm>.

- Rose, Mark. *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993. Print.
- Shackelford, Anita. "One Judge's Look at Computerized Quilting." *Quilters Newsletter* Jan.-Feb. 2007: 28. Print.
- Smith, Janet Jo. "Copyright: Answers to Quilter's Questions." *Quilters Newsletter* June 1998: 46-47; July-Aug. 1998: 18-19; Sept. 1998: 52-53. Print.
- . "Copyright for Quilters and Other Visual Artists." Rocky Mountain Quilt Museum, Golden. 17 Dec. 2009. Lecture.
- Waldvogel, Merikay, and Barbara Brackman. *Patchwork Souvenirs of the 1933 World's Fair*. Nashville: Rutledge Hill Press, 1993. Print.
- Webster, Marie D. *Quilts: Their Story and How to Make Them*. 1915. Pref. Rosalind Webster Perry. Santa Barbara: Practical Patchwork, 1990. Print.
- Woodmansee, Martha, and Peter Jaszi, eds. *The Construction of Authorship: Textual Appropriation in Law and Literature*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994. Print.